

CH-1 WHAT IS DEMOCRACY? WHY DEMOCRACY?

DEFINITION OF DEMOCRACY

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

FEATURES OF DEMOCRACY

A. Rulers elected by the people take all the major decisions.

In a democracy the final decision-making power must rest with those elected by the people. Some countries don't abide by this feature. For example, Pakistan. In Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf led a military coup in October 1999

- He overthrew a democratically elected government and declared himself the 'Chief Executive' of the country
- Later he changed his designation to President and in 2002 held a referendum in the country that granted him a five year extension
- Referendum was based on malpractices and fraud
- In August 2002 he issued a 'Legal Framework Order' that amended the Constitution of Pakistan (according to this Order, the President can dismiss the national and provincial assemblies)
- After passing this law, elections were held to the national and provincial assemblies
- But the final power rests with military officers and General Musharraf himself.

B. Free and fair electoral competition

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

Some countries don't abide by this feature. For example, China and Mexico. In China, elections are regularly held after every five years for electing the country's parliament, called Quanguo Renmin Daibiao Dahui (National People's Congress)

- The National People's Congress has the power to appoint the President of the country (3,000 members)
- Some members are elected by the army. Before contesting elections, a candidate needs the approval of the Chinese Communist Party. Only those who are members of the Chinese Communist Party or eight smaller parties allied to it were allowed to contest elections held in 2002-03.
- In China the elections do not offer the people any serious choice. They have to choose the ruling party and the candidates approved by it. The government is always formed by the Communist Party. Since its independence in 1930, Mexico holds elections after every six years to elect its President
- The PRI was known to use many dirty tricks to win elections
- All those who were employed in government offices had to attend its party meetings
- Teachers of government schools used to force parents to vote for the PRI
- Media largely ignored the activities of opposition political parties except to criticize them
- Sometimes the polling booths were shifted from one place to another in the last minute, which made it difficult for people to cast their votes. People seemed to really have a choice but in practice they had no choice.
- These are not fair elections.

C. One person, one vote, one value

In a democracy, each adult citizen must have one vote and each vote must have one value. Countries which don't abide by this feature: -

- a. In Saudi Arabia women do not have the right to vote.
- b. Estonia has made its citizenship rules in such a way that people belonging to Russian minority find it difficult to get the right to vote.

- c. In Fiji, the electoral system is such that the vote of an indigenous Fiji has more value than that of an Indian-Fijian.

D. Rule of law and respect for rights

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

Some countries don't abide by this feature. For example, Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe attained independence from White minority rule in 1980

- Since then the country has been ruled by ZANU-PF, Robert Mugabe, has been ruling the country since independence
- Elections have been held regularly and always won by ZANU-PF
- Over the years his government has changed the constitution several times to increase the powers of the President and make him less accountable
- Opposition party workers are harassed and their meeting disrupted (Public protests and demonstrations against the government are declared illegal)
- Television, radio and independent newspapers are controlled by the government and give only the ruling party's version
- The government has ignored some court judgments that went against it and has pressurized judges.

Arguments against democracy

- Leaders keep changing in a democracy. This leads to instability.
- Democracy is all about political competition and power play. There is no scope for morality.
- So many people have to be consulted in a democracy that it leads to delays.
- Elected leaders do not know the best interest of the people. It leads to bad decisions.
- Democracy leads to corruption for it is based on electoral competition.
- Ordinary people don't know what is good for them; they should not decide anything.

ARGUMENTS FOR DEMOCRACY

- **A democratic government is a better government because it is a more accountable form of government.**

Example-China's famine of 1958-1961 was the worst recorded famine in world history. Nearly three crore people died in this famine. During those days, India's economic condition was not much better than China. The existence of democracy in India made the Indian government respond to food scarcity in a way that the Chinese government did not. They point out that no large-scale famine has ever taken place in an independent and democratic country. If China too had multiparty elections, an opposition party and a press free to criticize the government, then so many people may not have died in the famine.

- **A democratic government is a better government because it is a more accountable form of government.**

Democracy is based on consultation and discussion. A democratic decision always involves many persons, discussions and meetings. When several people put their heads together, they are able to point out possible mistakes in any decision. This reduces the chances of rash or irresponsible decisions.

- **Democracy provides a method to deal with differences and conflicts.**

In democracy, no one is a permanent winner. No one is a permanent loser. Different groups can live with one another peacefully. In a diverse country like India, democracy keeps our country together.

- **Democracy enhances the dignity of citizens.**

People are not subjects of a ruler, they are the rulers themselves. Even when they make mistakes, they are responsible for their conduct.

- **Democracy is better than other forms of government because it allows us to correct its own mistakes.**

BROADER MEANINGS OF DEMOCRACY

The majority of people rule through their elected representatives. This become necessary because:

- Modern democracies involve such a large number of people that it is physically impossible for them to sit together and take a collective decision.
- Even if they could, the citizen does not have the time, the desire or the skills to take part in all the decisions.

AT THE TIME OF QUICK REVISION

DEMOCRACY

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

In a democracy:

- Rulers are elected by the people to take major decisions.
- Through elections, a fair and choice of opportunity is given to people to change the current ruler.
- This choice and opportunity is available to all the people on an equal basis.
- The exercise of this choice leads to the formation of a government, limited by basic rules of the constitution and citizen's right.

DEMERITS OF DEMOCRACY

- In a democracy, the leader is changed after a duration of a certain period. This results in instability.
- As democracy is about the political competition and power play, it leaves no space for morality.
- If a decision has to be made or a law has to be con rmed, there are a lot of people consulted for the process leading to the delay of the decision.
- As democracy is based on electoral competition, it leads to corruption.

MERITS OF DEMOCRACY

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

PAKISTAN – A DEMOCRACY?

- In 1999, A military General, Pervez Musharraf took over the government.
- In 2002, he changed his designation to President, also held a referendum that granted him 5 years of extension.
- In 2002, he issued a Legal Frame Work, according to which he amended the constitution. It gave the president the right to dismiss the national/provincial assemblies.
- The work of civilian cabinet was supervised by a National Security Council, which was dominated by the military. After the law was passed, elections were held in the assemblies.
- Therefore, there were elected representatives that had some power, but the real power was under the military and General Musharraf.

OUTCOME

The representatives elected by the people were not the real rulers. The main power rested under General Musharraf, who forced himself as the President on the people. Therefore, Pakistan could not be called a 'democracy'.

ZIMBABWE – A DEMOCRACY?

- Zimbabwe gained independence in the year 1980. Since then, the country had been ruled by the party ZANU-PF, this party led the freedom struggle in the leadership of Robert Mugabe.
- Since then, the elections had held at a regular pace and won by ZANU-PF.
- President Mugabe is popular but also uses unfair practices in elections. Over the years, this government has changed the constitution several times to increase his powers and less accountability.
- The opposition party workers were harassed and their meetings were disrupted. Public demonstration against the government are illegal.
- Television and radio are controlled by the government and give only the ruling party's vision. There are independent newspapers but the government harasses journalists who go against them.

OUTCOMES

The approval of the rulers is necessary in a democracy but not sufficient.

ASSIGNMENT

SOLVED NCERT QUESTIONS

- Here are some pieces of 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: People who do not accept the country's official religion do not have a right to vote.
 - Country B: The same party has been winning elections for the last twenty years.
 - Country C: Ruling party has lost in the last three elections.
 - Country D: There is no independent election commission.

Ans. (a) Country A: People who do not accept the country's official religion, do not have a right to vote.	Undemocratic
(b) Country B: The same party has been winning elections for the last twenty years.	Democratic
(c) Country C: Ruling party has lost in the last three elections.	Undemocratic
(d) Country D: There is no independent election commission.	Not sure

- Here are some pieces of 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.

- a. **Country P:** The parliament cannot pass a law about the army without the consent of the Chief of Army.
- b. **Country Q:** The parliament cannot pass a law reducing the powers of the judiciary.
- c. **Country R:** The country's leaders cannot sign any treaty with another country without taking permission from its neighbouring country.
- d. **Country S:** All the major economic decisions about the country are taken by officials of the central bank, which the ministers cannot change.

Ans.	(a) Country P: The parliament cannot pass a law about the army without the consent of the Chief of Army	Undemocratic
	(b) Country Q: The parliament cannot pass a law reducing the powers of the judiciary.	Democratic
	(c) Country R: The country's leaders cannot sign any treaty with another country without taking permission from its neighbouring country.	Undemocratic
	(d) Country S: All the major economic decisions about the country are taken by officials of the central bank, which the ministers cannot change.	Not sure

3. Which of these is not a good argument in favour of democracy? Why?

- a. People feel free and equal in a democracy.
- b. Democracies resolve conflict in a better way than others.
- c. Democratic government is more accountable to the people.
- d. Democracies are more prosperous than others.

Ans. d. The argument 'd', which states that democracies are more prosperous than others is not a good argument in favour of democracy. Democracy enables the people to elect their government and hold it accountable. This does not guarantee prosperity but means for the country to achieve prosperity. It depends upon the people and the government on how effectively they use democratic values and institutions to achieve prosperity for the country.

4. Each of these statements contains a democratic and an undemocratic element. Write out the two separately for each statement.

- a. A minister said that some laws have to be passed by the parliament in order to conform to the regulations decided by the World Trade Organisation (WTO).
- b. The Election Commission ordered re-polling in a constituency where large-scale rigging was reported.
- c. Women's representation in the parliament has barely reached 10 per cent. This led women's organisations to demand one-third seats for women.

Ans.	Statement	Democratic Element	Undemocratic Element
A	The law is being introduced into the Parliament which would allow debate among the representatives of the people.		It should not be compulsory for any decision of World Trade Organisation (WTO) to be implemented by a country.
B	There is an Election Commission which has investigated reports of rigging and ordered re-polling.		The act of large-scale rigging undermines the electoral process in a democracy
C	Women are being represented in positions of political power and there are Women Organisations.		The representation of Women is at only 10%, which undermines equal representation to section of society.

5. Which of these is not a valid reason for arguing that there is a lesser possibility of famine in a democratic country?
- Opposition parties can draw attention to hunger and starvation.
 - Free press can report suffering from famine in different parts of the country.
 - Government fears its defeat in the next elections.
 - People are free to believe in and practise any religion.

Ans. d. People are free to believe in and practise any religion is not a valid reason.

6. There are 40 villages in a district where the government has made no provision for drinking water. These villagers met and considered many methods of forcing the government to respond to their need. Which of these is not a democratic method?
- Filing a case in the courts claiming that water is part of right to life.
 - Boycotting the next elections to give a message to all parties.
 - Organising public meetings against government's policies.
 - Paying money to government officials to get water.

Ans. d. Paying money to government officials to get water is not a valid democratic method.

7. Write a response to the following arguments against democracy:

- Army is the most disciplined and corruption-free organisation in the country. Therefore army should rule the country.
- Rule of the majority means the rule of ignorant people. What we need is the rule of the wise, even if they are in small numbers.
- If we want religious leaders to guide us in spiritual matters, why not invite them to guide us in politics as well. The country should be ruled by religious leaders.

Ans. Democracy is a form of government in which the rulers are elected by the people. Army rulers are not elected and therefore it is not a democratic government. Individuals from the army may contest elections and then be elected as rulers.

The rule of the majority ensures that the representatives are elected after being accepted by the majority. Also, who gets to decide who the wise are and the ignorant. An informed voter through educational campaigns will allow rule of the majority to become the rule of the wise.

Political matters are different from spiritual matters and therefore should not be taken as similar. Religious leaders are not elected and therefore it will not be a democratic government. Religious leaders may contest elections and then be elected as rulers.

8. Are the following statements in keeping with democracy as a value? Why?

- Father to daughter: I don't want to hear your opinion about your marriage. In our family, children marry where the parents tell them to.
- Teacher to student: Don't disturb my concentration by asking me questions in the classroom
- Employee to the officer: Our working hours must be reduced according to the law.

Ans. a. Democracy as a value ensures an equal opportunity in decision-making. The father is behaving as a dictator by refusing to hear the view of the daughter. Democracy also ensures accountability of public representatives and institutions.

- The teacher when inside the classroom should fulfil his/her duties by answering the questions of the students. Democracy also ensures rule of law.
- The officer should follow the rules established and reduce the working hours.

9. **Consider the following facts about a country and decide if you would call it a democracy. Give reasons to support your decision.**

- a. All the citizens of the country have right to vote. Elections are held regularly.
- b. The country took loan from international agencies. One of the conditions for giving loan was that the government would reduce its expenses on education and health.
- c. People speak more than seven languages but education is available only in one language, the language spoken by 52 percent people of that country.
- d. Several organisations have given a call for peaceful demonstrations and nationwide strikes in the country to oppose these policies. Government has arrested these leaders.
- e. The government owns the radio and television in the country. All the newspapers have to get permission from the government to publish any news about government's policies and protests.

Ans. The country is not a democracy. The government is not accommodative to linguistic minorities since education is available in one language and therefore does not ensure dignity of citizens. Democracy provides a method to deal with differences and conflict but the government does not allow protests and has arrested those who hold a different opinion. There is no accountability of the government as information through media is regulated and censored.

10. **In 2004, a report published in USA pointed to the increasing inequities in that country. Inequalities in income reflected in the participation of people in democracy. It also shaped their abilities to influence the decisions taken by the government. The report highlighted that:**

- a. If an average Black family earns \$100 then the income of average White family is \$162. A White family has twelve times more wealth than the average Black family.
- b. In a President's election 'nearly 9 out of 10 individuals in families with income over \$ 75,000 have voted. These people are the top 20% of the population in terms of their income. On the other hand only 5 people out of 10 from families with income less than \$ 15,000 have voted. They are the bottom 20% of the population in terms of their income.
- c. About 95% contribution to the political parties comes from the rich. This gives them opportunity to express their opinions and concerns, which is not available to most citizens.
- d. As poor sections participate less in politics, the government does not listen to their concerns – coming out of poverty, getting job, education, health care and housing for them. Politicians hear most regularly about the concerns of business persons and the rich.

Write an essay on 'Democracy and Poverty' using the information given in this report but using examples from India.

Ans. Poverty and Democracy highlights an important complicated relationship between the two. It points out how fundamental rights of democracy are given to the elite section but the poor are still being deprived of.

The pitfalls like chronic capitalism, unequal opportunities have widened the gap between the poor and rich. Rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer. The rich are influencing the government policies. The social power among the citizens is unbalanced which violate the fundamental principles of democracy.

Poverty has become a powerful threat. Political parties are run by the money of the riches. That's why these parties show apathy towards the needs of the poor. Artificial glitters of the modern industry, skyscrapers cannot hide the prevailing unhygienic dwellings of the poor.

Democracy is based on the principle of political equality on recognizing that the poorest and the least educated have the same status as the rich and the educated. Under such biased and pro-rich conditions, a nation can't be democratic for a long time. Sooner or later it will lead to conflicts for the betterment of democracy.

OTHER IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

ONE MARK QUESTIONS

1. **What does 'referendum' mean?**

Ans. Referendum is a direct vote in which an entire electorate is asked to either accept or reject a particular proposal. This may be adoption of a new constitution, a law or a specific governmental policy.

2. **What was PRI?**

Ans. It was a political party of Mexico called as Institutional Revolutionary Party.

3. **Which party is ruling over Zimbabwe since independence?**

Ans. ZANU–PF is the party that is ruling over Zimbabwe since independence.

4. **Why modern democracies are 'representative democracies'?**

Ans. Modern democracies involve such a large number of people that it is physically impossible for them to sit together and take a collective decision.

THREE MARKS QUESTIONS

1. **Compare the democratic system in China with Mexico.**

Ans. China:

- a. In China, the elections do not offer people any choice.
- b. They have to choose the ruling party and the candidates approved by it.

Mexico:

- a. In Mexico, the people seemed to have a choice but practically they did not have any choice.
- b. There was no way that the ruling party could be defeated, even if the people were against it.

2. **Give examples of the countries which do not provide equal rights to vote.**

Ans. There are many examples of countries which do not provide equal rights to vote.

Examples:

- a. In Saudi Arabia, women do not have the right to vote.
- b. Estonia has made its citizenship rules in such a way that people belonging to Russian minority find it difficult to get their right to vote.
- c. In Fiji, the electoral system is such that the vote of the Fijian has more value than that of an Indian Fijian.

3. **Give arguments against democracy.**

Ans. The arguments against democracy are:

- a. Leaders keep changing in a democracy. This leads to instability.
- b. Democracy is all about political competition and power play. There is no scope for morality.
- c. So many people have to be consulted in a democracy that it leads to delays.
- d. Elected leaders do not know the best interest of the people. It leads to bad decision-making.
- e. Democracy leads to corruption because it is based on electoral competition.
- f. Ordinary people don't know what is good for them, so they should not decide anything.

4. **Give arguments in favour of democracy.**

Ans. The arguments in favour of democracy are:

- a. A democratic government is a better government because it is a more accountable form of government.
- b. It improves the quality of decision-making.
- c. It provides methods to deal with differences and conflicts.
- d. It enhances the dignity of citizens.
- e. It is better than other forms of government as it allows rulers to correct its own mistakes.

5. How democracy can enhance the dignity of the citizens?

- Ans. a.** Democracy is based on the principle of political equality on recognising that the poorest and the illiterate has the same status as rich and the educated.
- b.** People are not subjects of a ruler, they are the rulers themselves.
- c.** Even when they make mistakes, they are responsible for their conduct.

FIVE MARKS QUESTIONS

1. State the main features of democracy.

Ans. The main features of democracy are:

- a.** In a democracy, the final decision-making power must rest with those elected by the people.
- b.** A democracy must be based on free and fair elections, where those currently in power have a fair chance of losing.
- c.** In a democracy, each adult citizen must have one vote and each vote must have one value.
- d.** A democratic government rules within limits set by the constitutional law and citizens' rights.
- e.** Democracy provides a method to deal with differences and conflicts. It enhances the dignity of the citizens.

2. How can you say that Pakistan was not exercising democracy when General Musharraf was ruling?

Ans. In Pakistan, General Musharraf led a military coup in October 1999.

- a.** He overthrew a democratically elected government and declared himself the 'Chief Executive' of the country.
- b.** Later, he changed his designation to that of a President and in 2002, held a referendum in the country that granted him a five-year extension.

The government in Pakistan, under General Musharraf, cannot be called a democracy because:

- a.** People may have elected their representatives to the national and provincial assemblies but those elected representatives are not really the rulers. They cannot take the final decisions.
- b.** The power to take the final decision rests with the army officials and with General Musharraf and none of them are elected by the people. This happens in many dictatorships or monarchies. They formally have an elected parliament and government but the real power is with those who are not elected.
- c.** Pakistani media, human right organisations and democracy activists said that referendum held by General Musharraf was based on malpractices and fraud.

3. Giving an example of Zimbabwe, show how laws were made by one single ruler.

Ans. Since Zimbabwe got independence in 1980, it is being ruled by ZANU-PF which led the freedom struggle.

- a.** Its leader, Robert Mugabe has been ruling the country since independence. But ZANU-PF won due to unfair practices in elections.
- b.** His government has made changes in the constitution several times to increase the power of the President and make him less accountable.
- c.** The opposition party workers were harassed and their meetings were disrupted.
- d.** Public protests demonstrations are declared illegal.
- e.** Laws are made to limit the right to criticise the President.
- f.** The media has been forced to write and speak in favour of the ruling party.
- g.** There are independent newspapers but the government harasses those journalists who go against it. The government has ignored some court judgements that went against it and has pressurised judges.

This example of Zimbabwe shows that popular government can be undemocratic. Popular leaders can be autocratic. If we wish to assess a democracy, it is important to look at the elections and how they are fought.

4. **“Democracy is better than other forms of governments because it allows us to correct its own mistakes.” Do you agree with it or not?**

- Ans.** a. There is no guarantee that mistakes cannot be made in democracy. No form of government can guarantee that.
b. The advantage in a democracy is that such mistakes cannot be hidden for long.
c. There is a space for public discussion on these mistakes. And there is a room for correction.
d. Either the rulers have to change their decision or the rulers can be changed.
e. I believe, this cannot happen in a non-democratic government; so I fully agree that democracy does allow us to correct its own mistakes.

5. **Explain the statement—‘There should be sufficient room for normal political activity before election’.**

- Ans.** a. When elections are held, people’s representative got elected by the way of elections in which people should be given full freedom to choose their leader.
b. More choice should be given to the people, so that citizen should be able to make their own choice.
c. People should exercise right to choose, right to form opinion and right to speech, right to express their opinion and right to bring a change in the government if needed. That is called true democracy.

6. **‘In a democracy, no one is a permanent winner or loser’. Why do we say that? Give three points?**

- Ans.** a. In any country, we find people of different ethnic groups, different communities living together. In that kind of social diversity government take different ways of power sharing.
b. There can be difference of opinions or history proves divisions of the countries are all due to these variations in a society.
c. But these different groups can be able to live amiably if a government is able to accommodate all. Then government cannot be permanent winner or loser.

7. **‘Despite being a better form of government, democracy does not prove a magical solution for all problems’. Do you agree? Explain with any three arguments.**

Ans. The arguments against democracy are:

- a. Leaders keep changing in a democracy. This leads to instability.
- b. Democracy is all about political competition and power play. There is no scope for morality.
- c. So many people have to be consulted in a democracy that it leads to delays.

The arguments in favour of democracy are:

- a. A democratic government is a better government because it is a more accountable form of government.
- b. Democracy improves the quality of decision-making.
- c. Democracy provides methods to deal with differences and conflicts.

8. **“It is the citizen of a country, who make good or bad democracies.” Justify the statement by giving three suitable reasons.**

- Ans.** a. Since independence in 1930, Mexico holds elections every six years to elect their President.
b. But until 2000, every election was won by a party called PRI. Opposition parties did contest elections, but never managed to win.
c. The PRI was known to use many dirty tricks to win elections. The PRI spent large sums of money in the campaign for its candidates and booths were shifted from one place to another in the last minute, which made it difficult for the people to cast their votes.

China:

- a. In China, the elections do not offer people any choice.
- b. They have to choose the ruling party and the candidates approved by it.

Mexico:

- a. In Mexico, the people seemed to have a choice but practically they did not have any choice.
- b. There was no way that the ruling party could be defeated, even if the people were against it.