

# WHAT IS DEMOCRACY? WHY DEMOCRACY? CLASS 9

## NOTES SOCIAL SCIENCE CIVICS CHAPTER 2

In the previous 3 years of examinations, significant importance has been given to the following topics from this chapter. The students are therefore asked to have a deep understanding as detailed answers (Long Answer Type) could be asked on these concepts.

- Meaning and Features of Democracy
- Importance of Democracy
- Alternatives to Democracy

### WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

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

### IN PAKISTAN

- President Musharraf had 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.
- Now Pakistan has an elected government.

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

For example, 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 malpractices, with freedom denied to the opposition.
- This is not what a democracy should be.

**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.**

**A democratic government rules within the 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.**

**The Pillars of Democracy are The Sovereignty of the people, Government based upon the consent of the government, Majority rule, Minority rights, Guarantee of basic human rights, Free and Fair elections, Equality before the law, Constitutional limits on government, Values of tolerance, Pragmatism, Cooperation and Compromise.**

#### FREE AND FAIR ELECTORAL COMPETITION

In China, elections are held after every five years for electing the country's parliament, called Quanguo Renmin Daibiao Dahui (National People's Congress). Before contesting elections, a candidate needs the approval of the Chinese Communist Party. The government is always formed by the Communist Party. Alternatively, since its independence in 1930, Mexico holds elections after every six years to elect its President. But until 2000 every election was won by a party called PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party). Should we consider the elections described above as examples of people electing their rulers? Reading these examples we get a sense that we cannot.

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

### **ONE PERSON, ONE VOTE, ONE VALUE ONE VALUE**

Democracy is based on a fundamental principle of political equality. However, there are many instances of denial of the equal right to vote. Until 2015, in Saudi Arabia, women did not have the right to vote. Estonia has made its citizenship rules in such a way that people belonging to the Russian minority found it difficult to get the right to vote. In Fiji, the electoral system is such that the vote of an indigenous Fiji has more value than that of an Indian-Fijian. Definitely not a democratic government. The feature of democracy this highlights is that in a democracy, each adult citizen must have one vote and in turn, each vote must have one value.

### **RULE OF LAW AND RESPECT FOR RIGHTS**

Zimbabwe attained independence from White minority rule in 1980 and from then the country has been ruled by the party that led the freedom struggle, ZANU-PF. Its leader,

Robert Mugabe ruled the country since independence. Even if elections were held regularly, it was always won by ZANU-PF. President Mugabe was popular but also used unfair practices in elections. There was a law that limited the right to criticise the President. Television and radio were controlled by the government and gave only the ruling party's version. There were independent newspapers but the government harassed those journalists who went against it and so on. Not a democratic government. Democratic government rules within limits set by constitutional law and citizens' rights.

Hence, we can deduce that democracy is a form of government in which:

- Rulers elected by the people take all the major decisions
- Elections offer a choice and fair opportunity to the people to change the current rulers
- This choice and opportunity is available to all the people on an equal basis
- The exercise of this choice leads to a government limited by basic rules of the constitution and citizens' rights

## WHY DEMOCRACY?

### Points Against

There has been a 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 resolved. 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.

### **Alternative to Democracy**

- To overcome political instability and legislative gridlock associated with democratic rule, expansions of executive power and limits on democratic freedoms are been looked for.
- An exceptional example is that of Russia's transition from unstable democracy in the 1990s to economic growth and political stability.

### Arguments in Favour of Democracy

- **A democratic government is a better government because it is a more accountable form of government:** Take the example of India and China famines in 1958-1961. While China was hit badly, India did not fare as badly, despite its economic condition. Reason for this could be that India responded to the food scarcity in a way that the Chinese government did not. Here, we see that democracy is better than any other form of government in responding to the needs of the people.
- **Democracy improves the quality of decision-making:** Democracy is based on consultation and discussion. A democratic decision always involves many people, discussions and meetings and they are able to point out possible mistakes in any decision. This may take time. However, the advantage of taking time over important decisions is that it reduces the chances of rash or irresponsible decisions.

- **Democracy provides a method to deal with differences and conflicts:** In any society, people are bound to have differences of opinions and interests. These differences are particularly more in a country like ours with amazing social diversity. People belong to different regions, speak different languages, practise different religions and have different castes. The preferences of one group can clash with those of other groups. How do we resolve such a conflict? Democracy provides the only peaceful solution to this problem. In a democracy, no one is a permanent winner or loser. Different groups can live with one another peacefully.
- **Democracy enhances the dignity of citizens:** Democracy is based on the principle of political equality. It recognises that the poorest and the least educated have the same status as the rich and the educated.
- **Democracy is better than other forms of government because it allows us to correct our own mistakes:** Even if no government can guarantee that no mistakes will be made, in a democracy one can be sure that it will not be hidden for too long. It makes space for public discussion on these mistakes. There is also room for correction. Rulers have to change their decisions or they could themselves be changed.
- **Thus, we can correctly infer that while democracy may not be the solution to all problems, it is still clearly better than any other alternatives.**

## BROADER MEANINGS OF DEMOCRACY

In this chapter, the meaning of democracy is discussed in a descriptive sense. Students get to learn about democracy as a form of government, thus helping them to identify a clear set of minimal features that democracy requires. The common form adopted by democracy is representative democracy. In democratic countries, all people do not rule. A majority is allowed to take decisions on behalf of all the people through their elected representatives. This has become necessary for the reasons given below:

- 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.

Democracy, as a principle, can go beyond the government and can be applied to any sphere of life. People use the word democracy not to describe any

existing government but to set up an ideal standard that all democracies must aim to become. However, if the ideals of democracy are considered then no country in the world is correctly democratic. Still, having an understanding of democracy as an ideal will explain why to value democracy. It enables people to judge an existing democracy and identify their weaknesses. It also helps to distinguish between a minimal democracy and a good democracy. The most common form of democracy in today's world is being ruled through people's elected representatives. However, for a small community, there can be other ways of making democratic decisions. All people can sit together and make decisions directly. This is how the Gram Sabha should work in a village.