

Course Name- B.A.L.L.B IVth Sem.

Subject- Political Science

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Topic- Democracy

Meaning of Democracy:

Democracy is a derivation from two Greek terms “Demos” and “Kratos”. The former word means the people and the latter word means power. So democracy means “power of the people”. In democracy the preeminent factor is the people. There the government is run by the people and the main concern is the welfare of the people.

Democracy has a great educative force, because it strives for the development of the personality of the citizens. So democracy is not only a form of government but a kind of upgraded society. These are the warp and woof of a culture which may be called democracy culture.

There are several definitions of democracy Lord James Bryce defined democracy:

“Democracy is that form of government in which the ruling power is vested not in any individual, or in a particular class or classes but in the members of the community as a whole.” Albert Venn Dicey characterised it as – “A form of government in which the governing body is comparatively a large fraction of the entire nation.” Abraham Lincoln gave the historic definition by calling democracy as “government by the people, of the people and for the people.

Sir John Seeley gave a simple definition by describing democracy as- “A government in which everybody has a share.” For John Spencer Bassett- **“Democracy is a political method by which every citizen has the opportunity of participating through discussion in an attempt to reach voluntary agreements as to what shall be done for the good of the community as a whole.”** As a matter of fact, democracy is both a form of government and a way of life.

Although democracy has a definite and set method of its own, it has such a strong appeal that everybody and every institution tries to go by the name of democracy. The position has been nicely delineated by Carl J. Friedrich- **“Democracy has been the battle cry of the twentieth century.”**

Everyone is for democracy as he understands it. In the USA democracy means the existing scheme of things or some idealized version of it or even what the men of Philadelphia intended the constitution to be. In Britain too it means whatever one considers the government and politics of the country to be, but also more particularly what the Labour Party aspires to and has been seeking to accomplish, when it has been in power. In the USSR and communist China such American and British views are laughed at as reactionary.

Forms of Democracy:

There are two kinds of democracy. They are:

(a) Direct democracy and

(b) Indirect democracy.

(a) Direct Democracy:

It takes the form of such government in which all the adult persons gather in a public place to make laws, pass budgets and elect the executive. This type of government was possible in small city-states of Greece where the entire population of the city could assemble. It is not suitable for a large state. According to Esmein- **“Direct democracy simply involves an appeal from knowledge to ignorance and from responsibility to irresponsibility.”**

More importantly, direct democracy might have been possible and desirable in small countries like ancient Greek and Roman city-states where population was very few and life was very simple. The system is not appropriate for modern large states which have a complex life.

The vastness of the modern state and its huge population and, above all, the large size of the electorate will make it unworkable and even impossible on financial and administrative reasons. Now it is to be found in five cantons of Switzerland.

(b) Indirect Democracy:

government in which the people themselves do not make the laws, pass It is also called the representative form of democracy. It is that form of the budget and elect the executive. In an indirect democracy the people elect their representatives and these representatives make laws, pass the budget and elect the executive. In all modern states democracies are indirect. Thus England, the USA, France and India have indirect democracy.

Conditions Necessary for the Success of Democracy:

Democracy in the world is plagued by several maladies. As a cure, different philosophers have suggested different needs which include the reform of the electoral rolls, introduction of referendum, initiative and recall and increased cooperation of the people in the public affairs and improved capacity of the citizens.

But consensus among the political philosophers is that the following are the basic needs for the success of democracy:

1. Education:

A proper education is a must for the success of democracy. The sentinel of democracy is an educated and enlightened public opinion. Wide dissemination of knowledge and universalization of education is the pillar of democracy.

According to Dr Rajendra Prasad:

“Education is a power by itself and in any case a person bereft of it cannot have any chance of either realising himself to the full or making any effective or worthwhile impression on the policies and actions of the government of his country and region.”

Minus education, democracy will degenerate into mobocracy. Speaking at the Harvard University in 1987, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi asserted that in spite of widespread illiteracy, predominantly among the rural people, India could still be a democracy. He seemed to suggest that as far as democratic

thoughts and exercise of wisdom, democratic rights and norms are concerned, common sense is more important than literacy.

A democracy without wisdom is a potential anarchy. Training in and education for democracy is of the utmost importance if our conception of freedom is to prevail, for, as the Archbishop of York stated in the British House of Lords on 15 July 1942 – “The most dangerous of all forms of government is that of an uneducated democracy. It has no power of criticism and is at the mercy of any demagogue and of any dictator.”

2. Vigilance:

Eternal vigilance is not the price of liberty alone. It is a price of democracy too. It makes demand on ordinary citizens to take part. But the lazy people say – “**Oh! Leave it to someone else**”. But if they leave it to someone else, sooner or later they may fall under a dictatorship and that will be fatal. Alertness on the part of the citizens is another big foundation of democracy. Without it, democracy will be usurped by the demagogues.

The Germans lost their democracy during the time of Adolf Hitler for want of constant vigil on the rights of the people of Germany. Hitler cleverly raised the dream of democracy before the people only to crush it.

Unfortunately, for the want of alertness on the part of the people they could be so easily played into the hands of a potential dictator. This should be an eye-opener for all right thinking democrats.

Let us have a look into Bangladesh. That country established democracy in 1971. But soon the Bangladesh army liquidated the freedom-loving Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and captured power. Once again the wily politicians met with the same fate and put the country under military dictatorship.

This had been possible because there was no political awareness among the general people of Bangladesh. What happened in Pakistan and Bangladesh will not take place in England or the USA because there the people are politically conscious. This political vigilance is a must in a democracy.

3. Decentralisation of Political Powers:

Democracy functions effectively if there is a hierarchy of powers from the centre to the village unit. This kind of elaborate system of local self-government will train the people in the art and science of the government.

Thus more power should be decentralised into the Panchayats and civic bodies. This type of democratisation of the institutions will minimise the scope of anybody to misuse the mechanism of the government.

Perhaps there is no better suggestion on it than that given by Dr K. N. Katju – “If I have my way, I would enact a law which would prescribe that no person should be elected to a legislature unless he or she had worked either in a municipality or in a Panchayat for minimum period of three years. A municipality gives the necessary experience in administration and tests in the individual members as to whether they would really serve the people or serve themselves.”

4. Civic Sense:

In a democracy the maximum participation of the citizenry is assured. There is a corresponding civic responsibility from the side of the citizens. The citizens should have high sense of moral rectitude. If the citizens idle away their responsibility there is an end to democracy.

In the absence of selfless devotion to the public good, democracy is maimed. Democracy is indeed a difficult government, because it presupposes civic capacity on the part of the citizens. According to Lord James Bryce, this capacity consists in “intelligence, self-control and conscience.” So Mrs. Indira Gandhi rightly said – “Democracy is the best form of government, but it is certainly the most difficult”

5. Spirit of Tolerance:

Democracy is a government of the majority. What should be the attitude of the majority towards the minority? It should be one of sympathy and tolerance. A religious and linguistic majority must not disrespect the similar sentiments of the minority. The majority must hear the view-point of the other people.

According to Mahatma Gandhi – “Evolution of democracy is not possible, if we are not prepared to hear the other side. We shut the doors of reasons when we refuse to listen to our opponents, or having listened, make fun of them. If intolerance becomes a habit we run the risk of missing the truth.”

According to Rajiv Gandhi – “Democracy means discussion. There is no place of violence in a democratic set-up. Tolerance is necessary for the

success of democracy.” Thus democratic virtue is humility, because humility is needed for tolerance. But here is one thing the democrat cannot tolerate, namely injustice. His vigilant sympathy must be directed against all kinds of injustice.

6. Freedom of Speech Association and Press:

The bedrock of democracy is freedom of speech, association and press. If not democratic personality of a citizen cannot be fully blossomed.

Democracy demands that all sections of the people should be taken into confidence as far as practicable. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi said – “Dialogue is the essence of democracy. In giving power to the people we have engaged in the most extensive process of consultation since independence”.

If there is no individual liberty there is no democracy. This liberty includes the freedom to freely and without fear express the views either in a public speech or in newspapers and other literary media. Man is a gregarious animal and as such there must be a guarantee of free association to mobilise public opinion. These are the three levers of democracy.

7. A Written Constitution Containing Fundamental Rights:

A written constitution is better than an unwritten one, because in it all the powers of the authorities and the rights of the citizens are put in black and white. If there is no written constitution, the rights of the people will be vague and uncertain. Fortunately, the constitutions of India, France, Australia and the USA have written provisions in which the fundamental rights are guaranteed.

Although the constitution of England is an unwritten one the fundamental rights are enshrined in the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights. If the guaranteed rights of the citizens are taken away by any authority, the people can depose the government and establish a better one.

8. Separation of Power:

The theory of separation of power came as a safeguard of democracy. It enables different departments of government to act as checks and

balances against each other's power. It guarantees the equal representation in the sharing of power to every section of the government.

According to Charles-Louis Montesquieu, the father of this theory, concentration of powers of law-making and law-enforcing and law-interpreting in the hands of one person or body will be the very definition of tyranny. In operational terms this theory requires certain sequence in the functioning of the government. The legislature, in this system, should have, an open debate on the subject and pass it by a majority decision.

In the second stage the executive has to translate it into action. Judicial review will come in the third stage, in case there is an excess of arbitrariness in so executing the will of the legislature in the executive. The third stage by the most important check in this system, since the executive very often bypasses the legislature.

9. Opposition Party:

An effective opposition party is a shield of democracy. This is well stated by Lord Clement Attlee – “Democracy owes a good deal to the attacks of its opponents because it makes us conscious of what our democracy is.” Actually the opposition party works as the mirror of the government and enables the government to correct the wrongs.

According to Chakravarty Rajagopalachari:

“A strong opposition is essential for the health of democratic government In a democracy based on universal suffrage, government by the majority without an effective opposition is like driving a donkey, on whose back you put the whole load in one bundle. The two-party system steadies movement by putting a fairly equal load into each pannier. In the human body, two eyes and two ears enable a person to place the objects seen and heard. A single party democracy soon loses its sense of proportion. It sees but cannot place things in perspective or apprehend all sides of a question”.

10. Democracy is a Myth without Economic Equality:

It implies that there must be an economic democracy for the success of political democracy. If money is allowed to be accumulated in the hands of the rich few, how can the poor effectively exercise their democratic rights?

It is said that in England the Bank of England rules and the USA has a dollar democracy.

This economic inequality eats out the vitals of democracy. If there is a right to work, a right to minimum wages and if the industries and big businesses are taken over and run by the government, democracy stands on a better footing.

11. Fearlessness:

The democratic people must be fearless and brave. Timid people do not deserve it. The most essential prerequisite for the successful functioning of democracy is that the people must be strong and courageous. If love for freedom dies in the hearts of the people, they will lose the ability to say “no” to an unprincipled direction of the boss and will compromise their dignity and human values for paltry gains. In such a condition democracy cannot survive. They must ceaselessly and fearlessly criticise the government that seeks to trample their liberties.

It is a truism that any political party, when it comes to power, tends to behave less democratically, for the power it acquires has a corrupting influence. The people must, there for, be always vigilant to their rights fearlessly. Otherwise, they will be in danger of losing their freedom.

Merits and Demerits of Democracy in General:

Merits of Democracy:

First, democracy is ethically sound because it is opposed to the idea of one man ruling over another man. In a democracy no individual or a group of individuals but the entire community is vested with sovereign power.

According to John Dewey – **“The foundation of democracy is faith in the capacities of human nature, faith in human intelligence and in the power of pooled cooperative existence.”**

Only that person is said to be free who possesses a vote and shares in determining state policy and electing the government. John Stuart Mill said – “What toucheth all should also be decided by all.”

Secondly, democracy promotes the common welfare of the people. Democracy caters to the needs of all because all shades of opinion represent the government. In such a system, a citizen is the ruler and at the same time the subject and thereby it conforms to the axiom that a just government is a government by consent of the governed.

In this context John Stuart Mill said:

“The participation in governmental affairs lift the individual above the narrow circle of his egoism and broadens his interests. Democracy makes an individual interested in his country and gives him a sense of responsibility.”

Thirdly, it is in democracy that the concept of rule of law can have a full play. According to this concept, which came from England, nobody is above law and everything must be done in accordance with the mandates of law. This principle is not only a replacement of the personal rule of a King but also a brake on the misuse of power by the government or any authority.

Fourthly, democracy nurses the spirit of patriotism and nationalism of the people and evokes spontaneous obedience to law. In a democracy the people feel that they themselves are the government and the nation rolled into one.

This is rightly stated by John Stuart Mill:

“Democracy strengthens the love of country, because the citizens feel that the government is their own creation and the rulers their servants rather than masters.” This idea tinctures into them a spirit of patriotism and nationalism.

Fifthly, a democratic form of government cannot be tyrannical or oppressive, because it is responsible to the people at large. In a democracy the government is voted to power by the people and is answerable for its actions and policies to the rock-bottom of the people. If the government fails to fulfil the aspirations of the people, it will be overthrown by the people in the next election. Again, there are free press and strong opposition which keep the government on guard.

If the ruling party goes astray it will be outvoted in a vote of no-confidence. So a democratic form of government is a responsible government. In defence of democracy John Stuart Mill wrote – “The whole people or some numerous portion of them exercise; the governing power through deputies periodically elected by them.”

Sixthly, a change in the government in a democracy is effected not in a violent way but through a peaceful method and thereby ensures a stability in administration. No other form of government has such a peaceful transition. When a revolution took place in England in 1688 to replace the disliked King James II by William III, this was done without inviting any bloodshed. So democracy is capable of meeting this type of national crisis peacefully.

This is a singular advantage of the democratic form of government.

So A. D. Lindsay rightly maintained:

“A democratic society sure of itself can be indefinitely elastic in its methods. It can, as in a time of crisis, give enormous powers into the hands of the government, in cheerful confidence that, the crisis past, it can take them away.”

But this is not possible in any other type of government. This peaceful transition’ makes the government durable. As R. G. Gettel rightly observed – **“Popular intelligence and virtue are its most valuable results. Popular election, popular control and popular responsibility ensure not only efficiency in government but also stability in the state.”**

Seventhly, democracy guarantees equality and liberty. Democracy makes no discrimination between the high and the low, the rich and the poor, and the wise and the fools and throws open all the opportunities, in the state to all the citizens of the state. Freedoms of all types are thereby ensured to all the citizens.

There is equal treatment for the son of a minister and the son of a peon in a democratic state. Similarly, the Hindus and the Muslims, or, for that matter, all men of different faiths, are never discriminated in the enjoyment of liberties. So John Stuart Mill emphasised – “Democracy is superior to other

forms of government because the rights and interests of every person are secure from being disregarded.”

Eighthly, democracy ensures openness. One of the characteristics of democracy is its openness. The people value the performance of such democratic norm on the basis of availability of information, which they gather from a free press. Again, in the protests of the opposition and the public pressures made in the legislature are found other guarantees of openness of the government in a democracy. The parliamentary control over public policy through democratic debates preserve the endurance of the government.

The dictatorial or a totalitarian system, on the other hand, operates in the mystiques of secrecy. In such a system, politics is rather exclusive and insulated. Thus dictatorship follows the guarded path, as a result of which the administration becomes a professional hideout of secrecy and confidential activities.

In such a system popular participation in the administration is absent and the committed model of bureaucracy keeps public administration loyal, efficient and secrecy-oriented. There stricted norms of secrecy are demanded and adhered to in public interests. But this keeps the government weak because it has no knowledge of what the people are thinking of the government. Since there is everything open in a democracy, the government knows the pulse of the nation. That is why there is practically no revolt or coup d’etat which is very common in dictatorship.

Finally, democracy contains a unique educational value and an assurance for freedom. Democracy goes hand in hand with education and self-government. All citizens are trained in the lesson of making laws, enforcing them and how to contribute their utmost in the welfare of the state.

Both the ruling and the opposition parties bring the benefits of political education at the national, provincial and village levels. In a democracy the entire nation is graded from the top to the bottom with the lessons of political education and self-government

Demerits of Democracy:

In 1900, democracy was looked upon as the final form of government for all civilised states. It was assumed that all policies on social, economic and international aims came within the framework of democratic government. But many an African and Asian countries that attained independence and established democracy as the form of government had to give up and surrender to military dictatorship.

There the “Humpty Dumpty” of democracy “had a great fall” and were replaced by dictatorships. These threw challenge to the bases on which democracy as a form of government stands. These were indications that all was not well with democracy. As moon has its dark spots, democracy always does not present a totally rosy picture.

The major drawback of democracy is that its accent of emphasis is on quantity rather than quality and thereby democracy imposes the tyranny of the brute majority. It does not recognise the inherent inequality in the calibre or wisdom which differs from man to man as a biological fact.

Thus when quality is ignored and the idiots are brought into prominence, democracy becomes a government by the ignorant and the unintellectual. So H. L. Mencken accused democracy for standardising life on a low level as if all wisdom lies with the inferior four-fifths of mankind. A. J. Carlyle called this multitude “mostly foolish”. The brute majority of mechanism established the rule of the fools over the intelligent ones who are in the minority. Thus what we get in a democracy is simply the tyranny of the people on the ground that they are in the majority.

This type of tyranny has a tendency to curtail the liberty of the individuals. Thus in India in the name of internal security or defence of India the people are locked up in jails without trial. It is for this reason that William Edward Lecky condemned democracy as opposed to liberty.

Secondly, democracy breeds inefficiency and corruption. In a democracy the administration is as slow as snails. It is marked by the red-tapsism of the bureaucrats in a way that everybody's business is nobody's business. It is for this reason that Emile Faguet calls democracy as “cult of incompetence”. The other inherent flaw of democracy is that it is incapable

of meeting any emergent situation like the First World War and the Second World War, with the result that many democratic countries had to assume dictatorial power to meet the war situation.

The elements of corruption in democracy are “spoil-system”, “lobbying” and “log-rolling”. The self-seeking leaders enter into coalition with seemingly unacceptable parties and to stay on power by distributing offices and various kinds of favouritism. Thus democracy is a breeding ground of inefficiency, nepotism, jobbery and favouritism. So Jawaharlal Nehru complained – “The speed of change in a democracy is obviously somewhat slower. The processes are slower than in an autocracy or authoritarianism.”

Thirdly, democracy encourages unhealthy party politics and discourages literary and artistic activities. In a democracy things are seen not with one's own eyes but through the eyes of the party bosses. So the party-men falsify facts, distort issues, make false propaganda and appeal to the emotions of the masses. Not only that. It is indifferent to the cause of education, literature and fine arts. So all great centres of education were established under the patronage of the absolute monarchy.

The famous literatures like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata did not flourish under democracy. The same is true with regard to the architectures and sculptures of Ellora, Ajanta and the Taj Mahal. So C. D. Burns is of the view that – “Democracy produces a civilisation which is banal, mediocre or dull.”

Fourthly, democracy is an expensive plutocracy. The decentralisation of government for the sake of self-government and the entire election system are very expensive. Thus huge money is spent in the general elections or the presidential election and the election of the civic bodies.

Thus it is burdensome and very often grinding on the developing countries. Democracy does not ensure liberty or equality. In effect, in a democracy the rich classes and ambitious leaders exploit the ignorant and the simple masses for their selfish gains. So Freitschke called democracy “a corrupt dollar worshipping plutocracy or oligarchy of the rich.” Well condemned American democracy as “corrupt plutocracy”.

Conclusion:

The merits of democracy must outweigh its demerits. Democracy stands for life and progress. Under favourable conditions it gives encouragement to self-reliance, initiative and responsibility. It holds authority in trust and guarantees equal considerations for all.

According to J. W. Goethe, democracy must be recommended as the best form of government because – “What is the best government? That which teaches us to govern ourselves.” Democracy is a tender plant and it needs to be nourished and watered by hands of faith. This done, Switzerland is a shining example of the success of democracy. So we may conclude with the words of Indira Gandhi – “Democracy is the best form of government, but it is certainly the most difficult.”