**WHAT IS DEMOCRACY ? WHY DEMOCRACY ?**

**Introduction:**

Some governments are democratic and some are non-democratic. Governments in some of those countries changed from one form to the other. Chile was a democracy except when it was under Pinochet’s rule. Poland gained independence from communist rule and became a democracy. Also, Ghana was a democracy in the early period of Nkrumah’s government. The word democracy originated from two Greek words: ‘demos’ meaning people and ‘kratia’ meaning rule. So democracy means rule by the people. Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as: “Democracy is government of the people, by the people and for the people”.

Democracy is the most prevalent form of government in the world today and it is expanding to more countries.

**What is democracy ?**

**A simple definition:**

* Democracy is a system of governance where the citizens of a country choose representatives who form a governing body.

**Contradictions**

* The army rulers of Myanmar are not elected by the people. Those who happen to be in control of the army become the rulers of the country. People have no say in this decision.
* Dictators like Pinochet are not elected by the people. This also applies to monarchies.
* The kings of Nepal and Saudi Arabia rule not because the people have chosen them to do so but because they happen to be born into the royal family.

**FEATURES OF DEMOCRACY**

**Major decisions by elected leaders:**

* In Pakistan, General Parvez Musharraf took many decisions on his own after he overthrew the democratic government.
* He led a military coup in October 1999.
* He initially declared himself as the ‘Chief Executive’ of the country and later the ‘President’.
* In a referendum in 2002, using malpractices and fraud, he extended his term as President for five more years.
* He granted himself the power to dismiss the national and provincial assemblies through a ‘Legal Framework Order’ in August 2002.
* Even though Pakistan elected representatives, those representatives did not have the power to make any decisions.
* Clearly, such a practice was not democratic as Musharaf was not elected ‘by the people’ but had the power to make decisions.
* In a democracy, the final decision making power must with those elected by the people.

**Free and fair electoral competition:**

* The National People’s Congress known as Quanguo Renmin Daibiao Dahui, appoints the President in China.
* The National People’s Congress which has 3000 members is elected every five years and the candidates require approval from the Chinese Communist party to contest for the election.
* Some members are elected by the army.
* In 2002-2003 only members of the Chinese Communist party and its 8 allies were allowed to contest for the elections.
* In Mexico, the President is elected after every 6 years, since 1930.
* Until 2000, PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) won every election, using unfair means.
* Teachers of government schools forced parents to vote for PRI.
* So, in China the people could only choose ruling parties but not candidates, while in Mexico, elections were unjustly held.
* A 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:**

* Women in Saudi Arabia could not vote until 2015.
* Russian minority in Estonia find it difficult to get the right to vote.
* Value of a vote is different for an indigenous and an Indian Fiji citizen.
* In a democracy, each adult citizen must have one vote and each vote must have one value.

**Rule of law and respect for rights:**

* Robert Mugabe, leader of ZANU – PF ruled Zimbabwe since its independence from the White minority rule in 1980.
* ZANU – PF led the freedom struggle.
* Robert Mugabe used unfair methods to win elections.
* Opposition party was harassed and public protest and demonstrations against the government were declared illegal.
* There was a law that limited the right to criticize the President.
* Until 2017, when he was forced out of office, he implemented many undemocratic and autocratic methods.
* A democratic government should respect basic rights of citizens and treat everyone equally.
* A democratic government should respect guarantees to the minorities.
* A democratic government rules within limits set by constitutional law and citizens’ rights.

**Summary Definition**

**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; and
* The exercise of this choice leads to a government limited by basic rulers of the constitution and citizens’ rights.

**Arguments against democracy:**

* **Unstable**: Different leaders are elected after a certain time interval.
* **Lack of morality**: Democracy involves political competition and power play.
* **Delay**: Due to many people involved.
* **Bad decisions**: Elected leaders are unaware of the best interests of people.
* **Corruption**: Due to electoral competition.
* **Decision**: Ordinary people should not decide for themselves because they do not know what is good for them.

**Arguments for democracy:**

* **More accountable**: Leaders need to respond to the needs of the people. Due to this, an independent and democratic country, like India has responded better to food scarcity than China.
* **Provides method to deal with differences and conflicts**: In a socially diverse country like India, difference and conflicts are likely to occur. Only when one knows that no one is a permanent winner or loser, we can peacefully resolve clashes.
* **Improved quality of decision making**: Due to consultation and discussion in a democracy and involvement of many people it is easier to point out mistakes in any decision.
* **Enhancement of dignity of citizens**: Since everyone is treated equally and each person in a democracy is ruler himself, people are responsible for their own conduct.
* **Correction of mistakes**: In a democracy, mistakes cannot be hidden for wrong but are publically discussed and corrected.

**Broader meaning of democracy:**

* Representative democracy is the commonest form of democracy in the modern world. This system involves common people electing officials to represent them.
* For smaller communities, democratic decisions are taken in alternative ways.
* All people do not rule in democratic countries.
* This is necessary because there are a large number of people in a country.
* Also citizens do not have time to involve in all decision making.
* A democratic decision involves all people who would be affected by it by consulting with them.
* This applies to families, schools and government or other organizations or any sphere of life.
* Democracy may be used to describe an ideal standard that all democracies must aim to become.
* All ideal practices are not implemented in any country and so no country is a perfect democracy.
* To achieve ideal democracy constant efforts are required to save and strengthen democratic forms of decision making.
* Unlike in monarchy or dictatorships, all citizens must show active political participation to make a country more democratic.