

**Topic:** What is Democracy? Why Democracy?

**Subject:** Social Studies (Civics)

**Class:** IX

## SOCIAL STUDIES (CIVICS)

### CHAPTER 01: WHAT IS DEMOCRACY? WHY DEMOCRACY?

(Notes)

#### WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

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The word 'Democracy' has been derived from a Greek word 'Demokratic'. 'Demos' means people and 'Kratia' means rule. So, Democracy is a form of Government in which the rulers are elected by the people.

#### Common Features of Democratic government and Non-democratic government:

**(a) Democratic Government**

- (i) Government formed by people's representatives.
- (ii) Representatives elected in a free and fair election.
- (iii) Different decisions of the government are taken in an open manner; debate in media, invitation to experts' opinion, representations by the common man form a part of decision making process.
- (iv) Citizens have a right to oppose and citizen any government action and policy.
- (v) Citizens have a right to protest, as long as the mode of protest is within the boundaries of law.

**(b) Non-democratic Government:**

- (i) Rule by force, by a person or by a group of persons.
- (ii) No opposition is permitted
- (iii) No criticism of government views or of rulers is tolerated.
- (iv) Decisions are taken in an arbitrary manner, without reference to any rules or laws.
- (v) Citizens have no rights.
- (vi) Citizens cannot resort to any method of protest.

#### Four Features of Democracy:

**(i) In a democracy, all major decisions are made by the elected leaders**

- General Pervez Musharraf led a military coup in Pakistan in October 1999. He later changed his designation to President. He also amended the Constitution of Pakistan according to which the President could dismiss the national or provincial assemblies. Moreover, although the people elect representatives to the provincial and national assemblies, the elected representatives were not authorized to make final decisions.
- The final decisions could only be taken by Musharraf and other senior military officers who were not actually elected representatives of the people.
- Pakistan, under such circumstances can not be called a democracy as the elected representatives of the people do not have the power to take major decisions in the country.

**(ii) In a democracy, free and fair elections should be held regularly**

- In China, elections are held regularly after every five years. People elect the members of the Parliament called National People's Congress. The Parliament has the power to elect the President of the country.
- In China, only the members of the Chinese Communist party or its eight allied parties can contest elections, and thus, only the Communist party can form the Government.
- Since its independence in 1930, Mexico holds elections after every six years to elect its president. The country has never been under military or dictator's rule. But still it cannot be called democratic country because



**Topic:** What is Democracy? Why Democracy?

**Subject:** Social Studies (Civics)

**Class:** IX

until 2000, every election was won by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (IRP). The IRP used every legal and illegal method to win the elections. Teachers in schools were forced to influence parents to vote for the IRP, media ignored all activities of the ruling party but only focused itself on criticizing the opposing parties and large sums were spent on campaigning for IRP candidates.

- Thus, democracy must be based on free and fair elections where those currently in power have a fair chance of losing the elections.

**(iii) Democracy should be based on the principle of one person, one vote and one value**

A true democracy grants its citizens what is called 'Universal Adult Franchise'. It means all the adults have a right to vote without any discrimination based on sex, color, race, caste or class. Each person can cast one vote; all votes are counted; the person who gets the maximum number of votes gets elected in many countries, this is not how the system works. There are many instances of denial of equal right to vote:

- In Saudi Arabia, women do not have the right to vote.
- In Fiji, the vote of a local Fiji has more value than that of an Indian-Fijian.
- In Estonia, the citizenship rules are such that the people belonging to the Russian minority find it difficult to vote.

Therefore, in a democracy, each adult citizen must have one vote and each vote must have one value.

**(iv) Rules of Law and Respect for Rights**

- In Zimbabwe, President Robert Mugabe has been ruling since independence. Although Mugabe is popular, he uses unfair practices during elections.
- He has amended the Constitution multiple times in order to increase the powers of the President and to make him less accountable.
- In a democracy people and opposition can criticize the government but this is not allowed in Zimbabwe. The members of opposition parties are jailed if they raise their voice against the Government and protests against the Government and its policies are declared illegal.
- The government has ignored some court judgments which is also against the principles of democracy.
- Television, radio and press are controlled by the government

The example of Zimbabwe shows that popular approval of the rulers is necessary in a democracy, but it is not sufficient. Popular government can be undemocratic also.

It is important for a democratic government to grant basic rights and freedoms to its citizens and the government should be accountable to its citizens. Besides, everyone should be equal in the eyes of law. These rights must be protected by an independent judiciary whose orders are obeyed by everyone. A democratic government cannot do whatever it likes, simply because it has won an election. It has to respect the basic rules and laws provided by the Constitution of the country. Every major decision of the government has to go through a series of consultations.

Therefore, a democratic government rules within the limits set by constitutional law and citizens' rights.

## **WHY DEMOCRACY?**

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### **Arguments in support of democracy**

- (i) A democratic government is a better government because it is a more accountable form of Government.**

**Topic:** What is Democracy? Why Democracy?

**Subject:** Social Studies (Civics)

**Class:** IX

- China suffered from one of the worst famines in 1958–1961. Nearly 3 Crore people died in the famine. No major famine occurred in India at this time. According to economists, it was perhaps because India is a democratic country.
- Democracy in India made the Government respond to food scarcity in a way in which the Chinese Government did not. It was because India has a multi-party system and free press. The Government may be criticized and even lose the next elections.
- This is not the case with the Chinese. Because China is ruled by the Communist party and no one can criticize the Government, the Chinese Government took the famine very casually.

**(ii) Democracy improves the quality of Decision Making**

- Democracy is based on consultations and discussions. People collectively discuss and take decisions.
- This reduces the possibility of taking any irresponsible decision.

**(iii) Democracy provides a method to deal with differences and conflicts**

- Differences are bound to take place in a society where people belonging to various castes, religion and classes live together.
- People belonging to different religions and castes have their own preferences and interests of one group may clash with the other
- If a powerful group begins to dictate its terms and forces its decisions over the other groups, it may lead to discontentment and resentment among the other people.
- Democracy provides peaceful solution to this problem because decisions which are taken by mutual consent are followed and respected by all.

**(iv) Democracy enhances the dignity of citizens**

- Democracy minimizes the differences between the rich and poor as well as between the educated and uneducated class by providing them a status of equality governed by the law.
- Equal rights to all in decision making irrespective of their class, caste, status, religion empowers the dignity of citizens.

**(v) Democracy allows people to correct their own mistakes**

- There are possibilities of taking wrong decisions in a democracy. However, as there is a space for public discussions, such mistakes cannot remain hidden from the people for long.
- If the representatives of the people do not change their incorrect decisions, they may not get elected by the people in the next elections.



**Arguments against the democracy**

- (i) Democracy leads to instability as leaders keep on changing in a democratic setup.
- (ii) The decision-making process is delayed in a democracy because several people have to be consulted in a democratic setup.
- (iii) Democracy is all about political competition and power play. There is no scope for morality.
- (iv) Sometimes even elected people do not know about the best interests of the people. Thus, at times, it leads to bad decisions.
- (v) There are several cases of corruption as democracy is based on electoral competition.

**Topic:** What is Democracy? Why Democracy?

**Subject:** Social Studies (Civics)

**Class:** IX

(vi) Ordinary people do not know what is good for them. Thus, they should not decide anything.

Currently most of the countries practice a form of democracy in which representatives of the people make laws and take decisions on behalf of the people who voted for them. This is called representative democracy.

We find that no country in the world is a perfect democracy but certainly it is the best form of government.