



Democracy is the rule of the people or their representatives. According to Abraham Lincoln, famous US president, 'Democracy is a government of the people, for the people and by the people'.

Emergence of Democracies

About 2600 years ago in India, many small states called *mahajanapadas* developed. While most of these states were ruled by a king, some states called *ganas* or *sanghas*, were ruled by representatives. The Vajji *gana* had this democratic kind of political system. In ancient Greek city state of Athens all adult males aged 30 or more in the city formed a body called the Assembly and participated in the decision-making process directly. In 1688, a popular revolt called Glorious Revolution brought to an end the autocratic rule of James II in England and the power passed into the hands of the Parliament (group of elected representatives). In 1776, people of America revolted against the British rule. It led to a war which ended the foreign rule in America. They adopted a democratic constitution in 1787. The new government of USA adopted the Bill of Rights which granted certain rights to its citizens. It led to the rise of democratic movement all over the world. In 1789, there was a revolution in France which led to the establishment of the French Republic based on the principles of liberty, fraternity and equality. These principles or ideals given by French Revolution led to an everlasting effect for the rise of nationalism and democratic movements all over the world. It inspired many European, Latin American and North American states to give voting rights to their people. In the 20th century many countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America became independent and adopted democracy.

Our neighbouring country Nepal has turned into a democracy from a monarchy in mid-2006 after a long struggle by its people.

Key Feature of Democracy

Equality is a key feature of democracy and it influences all aspects of its functioning. It is felt that democracy is better because it promotes

equality among citizens, it enhances the dignity of the individual, it improves the quality of decision-making, it provides a method to resolve conflicts and it allows room to correct mistakes.

Our country India is one of over a hundred countries of the world today that claim and practise some kind of democratic politics : they have formal constitutions, they hold elections, they have political parties and they guarantee rights of citizens. While these features are common to most of them, these democracies are very much different from each other in terms of their social situations, their economic achievements and their cultures. Clearly, what may be achieved or not achieved under each of these democracies will be very different.

Different Systems of Power

When we talk to people around us, most of them support democracy against other alternatives, such as rule by a monarch or military dictator or religious leader. But not so many of them would be satisfied with the democracy in practice. So, we face a dilemma : **democracy is seen to be good in principle, but felt to be not so good in practice.** This dilemma invites us to think hard about the outcomes of democracy.


The non-democratic rulers do not have to bother about deliberation in assemblies or worry about majorities and public opinion. So, they can be very quick and efficient in decision making and implementation. But it may take decisions that are not accepted by the people and may therefore face problems. Democracy is based on the idea of deliberation and negotiation. So, some delay is bound to take place. But because it has followed procedures, its decisions may be both more acceptable to the people and more effective.

The citizen has the right and means to examine the process of decision making. This is known as **transparency**. This factor is often missed from a non-democratic government. The democratic government develops mechanisms for citizens to hold the government accountable and mechanisms for citizens to take part in decision making whenever they think fit.

Expected outcomes of a democracy are : regular free and fair elections; open public debate on major policies and legislations; and citizens' right to information about the government and its functioning. It may be reasonable to expect from a democracy a government that is attentive to the needs and demands of the people and is largely free of corruption. But the record of democracies is not impressive on these two counts. Democracies often frustrate the needs of the people and often ignore the demands of a majority of its population. But non-democracies are not more sensitive to people. The routine tales of corruption may be heard. But non-



The parliament (assembly) is the foundation of democracy



democracies are not less corrupt. A democratic government may be slow, less efficient, not always very responsive or clean but it is people's own government. That is why there is an overwhelming support for the idea of democracy all over the world.

Equality in a Democracy

Democracies are based on political equality. All individuals have equal weight in electing representatives. Parallel to the process of bringing individuals into the political arena on an equal footing, we find growing economic inequalities. Small number of very rich people enjoy a very big share of wealth and income. Not only that, their share in the total income of the country has been increasing. Those at the bottom of the society have very little to depend upon. Their incomes have been declining. Sometimes they find it difficult to meet their basic needs of life, such as food, clothing, house, education and health.

Democracy is a rule of the majority. The poor are in majority. So, democracy must be a rule of the poor. Yet democratically elected governments do not appear to be as keen to address the questions of poverty as you would expect them to. The situation is much worse in some other countries. People in several poor countries are now dependent on the rich countries even for food supplies.

Inequality in India

In India every adult person, male or female, aged 18 or more has the right to vote. This system is called '**Universal Adult Franchise**'. But the daily living and working conditions of many people are far from equal. Apart from being poor, people in India experience inequality in different ways such as caste and religion.


Caste Inequality

One of the more common forms of inequality in India is the caste system. Caste division is special to India. In other countries, it is not seen. All societies have some kind of social inequality and some form of division of labour. In most societies occupations are passed on from one generation to another. Caste system in India is an extreme form of this. Earlier, members of the same caste group practised the same or similar occupation, married within the caste group and did not eat with members from other caste groups. If you live in rural areas, your caste identity is something that you probably learned or experienced very young.

Partly due to the efforts of social reformers and partly due to other socio-economic changes, castes and caste system in modern India have undergone great changes. With large scale urbanisation, growth of education, changes of occupations, and weakening of the positions of the landlord in the villages, the old notions of 'higher' and 'lower' castes are breaking down. If you live in urban areas some of you might think that people no longer believe in caste. Now, most of the time, in urban areas it does not matter much who is walking along next to you



Only the poor people have to stand in line when their children are sick.



on a street or eating at the next table in a restaurant. The Constitution of India prohibited any caste-based discrimination yet caste has not disappeared from modern India. Some of the older aspects of caste have persisted. Even now, most highly educated urban Indians marry within their own caste or tribe. Untouchability has not ended completely. *Dalits* (meaning broken or oppressed) were and continue to be seriously discriminated against from schools to offices.

Religious Inequality

There are some people who hate people from different religious groups. Many countries including India have in their population, followers of different religions. In some places such as Northern Ireland, even when most of the people belong to the same religion, there can be serious differences about the way people practise that religion. The religious differences are often expressed in the field of politics.

Many people think that the followers of a particular **religion** must belong to one community. It also follows that people who follow different religions cannot belong to the same social community. This is the root cause of discriminating on the basis of religion. Therefore, such people avoid intermingling with the followers of different religions. Even they do not want to live in their neighbourhood. They do not like to take or give houses of different religious groups on rent.


Communalism was and continues to be one of the major challenges to democracy in our country. Our constitution does not give a special status to any religion. It prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion. But communalism can be seen in everyday life. Communal (religious group) prejudice and propaganda need to be countered in society and politics.

Population of Different Religious Groups in India, 2001

Hindu	80.5%
Muslim	13.4%
Christian	2.3%
Sikh	1.9%
Buddhist	0.8%
Jain	0.4%
All other religions	0.6%
No religion	0.1%

Enhancing Human Dignity

When persons are treated unequally, their dignity or self-respect is hurt. The caste someone is born into, the religion they practise, the class background they come from, whether they are male or female—these are often the things that determine why some people are treated unequally. But they deserve the same respect as anyone else.



Democracy is based on the principle of equality. It strives to achieve social and economic equality along with political equality. It recognises that the poorest and the uneducated have the same scope and status as the rich and educated. This system of government works towards eradicating poverty by giving special benefits to the economically and socially backward people to enhance human dignity of the poor and oppressed people. Reservation in educational institutions, public employment and elections for the people of certain castes and communities is done with this in view. However, the benefits of reservation cannot reach to all people. But the benefits are not reaching to all people of general class too.

Democracy stands much superior to any other form of government in promoting dignity and freedom of the individual. Every individual wants to receive respect from fellow beings. Often conflicts arise among individuals because some feel that they are not treated with due respect. The passion for respect and freedom are the basis of democracy. Democracies throughout the world have recognised this, at least in principle. This has been achieved in various degrees in various democracies. For societies which have been built on the basis of subordination and domination, it is not a simple matter to **recognise** that all individuals are equal.

Democracy in India has strengthened the claims of the disadvantaged and discriminated castes for equal status and equal opportunity. There are instances still of caste-based inequalities and atrocities, but these lack moral and legal foundations. Perhaps it is the **recognition** that makes ordinary citizens value their democratic rights.



Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Self-respect


“It is disgraceful to live at the cost of one’s self-respect. Self-respect is the most vital factor in life. Without it, man is a cipher. To live worthily with self-respect, one has to overcome difficulties. It is out of hard and ceaseless struggle alone that one derives strength, confidence and recognition.

Man is mortal. Everyone has to die some day or the other. But one must resolve to lay down one’s life in enriching the noble ideals of self-respect and in bettering one’s human life..... Nothing is more disgraceful for a brave man than to live life devoid of self-respect.”

— Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Formal Equality in Indian Constitution

Every individual in the country, including male and female persons from all castes, religions, tribes, educational and economic backgrounds are **recognised** as equal in the Indian Constitution. Still the inequality does exist but at least, the principle of the equality of all persons is recognised. This **recognition of equality** includes some of the following provisions in the Constitution :

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- (i) Every person is equal before the law, from President of the country to a domestic worker.
 - (ii) No person can be discriminated against on the basis of their religion, race, caste, place of birth or whether they are male or female.
 - (iii) Every person has access to all public places including playgrounds, hotels, shops and markets. All persons can use publicly available wells, roads and bathing *ghats*.
 - (iv) Untouchability has been abolished.

Provisions in the Indian Constitution

Article 15 of the Indian Constitution prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. It lays down that

1. The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
2. No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to
 - a. access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment, or
 - b. the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort, maintaining wholly or partly, out of state funds or dedicated to the use of the general public.

Article 16 of the Constitution provides equality of opportunity in matters relating to public employment, or appointment to any office under the State.

Article 17 of the Constitution declares untouchability and its practice in any form as “forbidden” and the enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability as “an offence punishable in accordance with the Law”.

In 1995, the Disabilities Act was passed by the Government of India, which states that persons with disabilities have equal rights and that the government should make possible their full participation in society. The government has to provide free education and integrate children with disabilities into mainstream schools. It also states that all public places including buildings, schools, etc. should be accessible and provided with ramps.

To implement the equality the government has made laws and put forth several government programmes or schemes to the disadvantaged communities. While earlier no law existed to protect people from discriminating and ill treatment, now there are several laws in India that protect every person’s right to be treated with dignity and as equal. In addition to laws, the government has set up several schemes to improve the lives of the communities and individuals who have been treated unequally for several centuries. There are also schemes

to ensure greater opportunity for people who have not had this in the past. **Midday meal scheme** is such a scheme. Under this scheme children in all government elementary schools are provided with cooked lunch. This programme might help promote greater equality of opportunity :

- (i) It helps reduce the hunger of poor students who often come to school with empty stomachs and therefore, cannot concentrate in studies.
- (ii) It also helped reduce caste prejudices because children from all castes eat this meal together.
- (iii) Earlier children would often go home for lunch and then not return to school. But now with the midday meal provided in the school, their attendance has improved.
- (iv) The mothers who earlier had to interrupt their work to feed their children at home during the day, now no longer need to do so.
- (v) More children who are poor have begun enrolling and regularly attending school.

However, many complaints have been received for the poor and unhygienic quality of food served in the schools. Moreover, the government could not provide such facilities that some private schools with heavy fees could provide. Only the rich children attend these schools. The poor can hardly reach to the government schools.

Even today people refuse to think the poor as equal even though the law requires it. Even though persons are aware that discrimination is against the law, they continue to treat people unequally on the basis of their caste, religion, disability, economic status and because they are women. One of the main reasons for this is that **attitudes change very slowly**. It is only when people begin to believe that no one is inferior, and that every person deserves to be treated with dignity, that present attitudes can change. Establishing equality in a democratic society is a continuous struggle.



Children being served their idday meal at a government school

Decision-Making Mechanisms

Since the people have the right to express their opinions and have a say in it, democracy brings about better decisions. In a democracy decision involves the consult and consent of the people who are affected by the decision. It involves many people, a number of discussions and meetings. Though it may take some time to arrive at a decision acceptable to a majority of the people, yet the chances of responsible decisions is reduced. In India, we have three layers of government : (i) at the local level, (ii) at the state level, and (iii) at the central level. Different representatives are elected by the people who take decisions at their respective levels. Hence in a democracy people participate in the decisions in one way or the other.

Accommodation of Differences

In India, there is an amazing diversity as there are people belonging to different regions and religions, speaking different languages, following a variety of customs and traditions, rich and poor, educated and uneducated and rural and urban. Due to these diversities, there may arise **some differences in their needs and opinions**. They may want to solve an issue in different ways. They may look at one thing from different perspectives and have different ideas. Different people from the same caste or religion may like to tackle an issue differently. Differences, at times, lead to conflicts which can be **resolved by developing a tolerant attitude**.

In democracy media plays a role in helping the people to raise their differences. The elected representatives has to take into consideration and respect the different opinions of the people. Thus, differences are negotiated and accomodated in the decision making process trying to satisfy all people or at least a majority of people. Here rules by majority means that in case of every decision, different persons and groups may and can form a majority. Democracy remains democracy only as long as every citizen has a chance of being in majority at some point of time. If someone is barred from being in majority on the basis of birth, then the democratic rule ceases to be accommodative for that person or group.

Issues of Equality in Other Democracies

Not only in India, but in many democratic countries, the struggle for equality continues. In the United States (of America), the famous democracy, the African-Americans continue to describe their lives today as largely unequal. They are called African-Americans as their ancestors were the slaves who were brought over from Africa. Prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, African-Americans were treated extremely unequally in the United States, a democratic country since 1787 and denied equality by law. For example, when travelling by bus, they either had to sit at the back of the bus or get up from their seat whenever a white person wished to sit. On 1 December 1955, Rosa Parks an African-American woman, refused to get up from her seat on a bus to a white man. She was tired from a long day of standing at work. She changed the course of American history with one defiant act. She was arrested by police. A huge agitation known as the **Civil Rights Movement** began against the unequal ways in which African-Americans were treated. As a consequence the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964 by which discrimination on the basis of race, religion or national origin was prohibited. It also stated that all schools would be open to African-American children. Prior to this they had separate schools specially set up for them. But a majority of the African-Americans being the poorest, they can afford only to attend government schools with poorly qualified teachers.



Miss Rosa Parks not leaving her seat



Challenge of Democracy

The struggle for the recognition of all persons as equal and for their dignity has to be maintained. Therefore, no country is completely democratic. Our interest in and fascination for democracy often pushes us into taking a position that democracy can address all socio-economic and political problems. If some of our expectations are not met, we start blaming the idea of democracy or we start doubting if we are living in a democracy. The first step towards thinking carefully about the outcomes of democracy is to recognise that **democracy is just a form of government. It can only create conditions for achieving something. The citizens have to take advantage of those conditions and achieve those goals.**

Most individuals today believe that their vote makes a difference to the way the government is run and to their own self-interest. Expectations from democracy also function as the criteria for judging any democratic country. As people get some benefits of democracy, they ask for more and want to make democracy even better. That is why, when we ask people about the way democracy functions, they will always come up with more expectations, and many complaints. The fact that people are complaining is itself a testimony to the success of democracy : it shows that people have developed **awareness and the ability to expect and to look critically at power holders** and the high and the mighty. A public expression of dissatisfaction with democracy shows the success of the democratic project : **it transforms people from the status of a subject into that of a citizen.**



Key Words

- » Parliament : the group of elected representatives.
- » Apartheid : discrimination or separation on the basis of race.
- » Monarchy : the form of government in which all power is vested in one supreme ruler.
- » Dictatorship : one man's rule over the country.
- » Democracy : the form of government in which the people are the ultimate source of authority.
- » Dignity : this refers to thinking of oneself and other persons as worthy of respect.
- » Community : a group of people who have the same interests, religion, race etc.
- » Constitution : a document that lays down the basic rules and regulations for people and government to follow.
- » Universal Adult Franchise : all citizens who are 18 and above have the right to vote.
- » Deliberation : careful consideration or discussion of something.

SUMMARY

- ▶ Democracy is better because it promotes equality among citizens, it enhances the dignity of the individual, it improves the quality of decision-making, it provides a method to resolve conflicts and it allows room to correct mistakes.
- ▶ In a democracy, the citizen has the right and means to examine the process of decision-making.
- ▶ Expected outcomes of a democracy are : regular, free and fair elections; open public debate on major policies and legislations; and citizens' right to information about the government and its functioning.

- ▶ In India every adult person, male or female, aged 18 or more has the right to vote.
- ▶ Apart from being poor, people in India experience inequality in other ways such as caste, religion.
- ▶ Every individual in the country, including male and female persons from all castes, religions, tribes, educational and economic backgrounds are recognised as equal in the Indian Constitution.

Exercise Time

A. Tick (✓) the only correct choice amongst the following :

1. In India every adult person, male or female, aged 18 or more has the right to _____.
a. speak b. vote c. educate d. marry
2. In _____, people of America revolted against the British rule _____.
a. 1775 b. 1776 c. 1777 d. 1778
3. _____ is based on the principle of equality _____.
a. Dignity b. Prejudice c. Democracy d. Community
4. In democracy _____ plays a role in helping the people to raise their difference.
a. media b. newspaper c. telephone d. radio
5. The Civil Rights Act was passed in _____.
a. 1960 b. 1962 c. 1964 d. 1966

B. Fill in the blanks :

1. The citizen has the _____ and means to examine the process of decision-making.
2. _____ is the most popular government in the contemporary world.
3. In India every person, male or female, aged _____ or more has the right to vote.
4. In many democratic countries the _____ for equality continues.
5. _____ is a key feature of democracy.

C. Match the Following :

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| 1. Dictatorship | a. Hereditary ruler |
| 2. Democracy | b. Worthy of respect |
| 3. Monarchy | c. Forcible rule by one man |
| 4. Dignity | d. Discrimination or separation on the basis of race |
| 5. Apartheid | e. Rule by elected representatives? |

D. Write true (T) or False (F) against the following statements in given brackets :

1. Democracy is based on the promotion of equality and dignity. □
2. Democracy does not help in the adjustment of diversities. □
3. Human dignity is enhanced through democracy. □
4. A special ramp should be made for the disabled children in the schools. □
5. Dictatorship is the most popular government in the contemporary world. □

E. Define the following terms :

1. Monarchy 2. Democracy 3. Dignity 4. Universal Adult Franchise



F. Answer in one word or one phrase :

1. Which bill gives basic rights to the people of America ?
2. Under which system of power, the post of the ruler is hereditary ?
3. In which year the Disabilities Act was passed in India ?
4. Which article of the Indian Constitution states that practice of untouchability is a punishable offence ?
5. Name one of the earliest democracies in India.

G. Answer these questions briefly :

1. What are the different systems of power ? Give two reasons why democracy is better than others ?
2. What are the expected outcomes of the democracy ?
3. In a democracy why is universal adult franchise important ?
4. State two ways in which Article 15 of the Indian Constitution addresses inequality.
5. What are the advantages of the midday meal programme implemented by the government ?

H. Answer these questions in detail :

1. Why is democracy better than other non-democratic governments ? Discuss.
2. What do you understand by formal equality of people ? What does Indian Constitution say about it ?
3. Give an account of the caste inequality and religious inequality in India.

PROJECT WORK

- Find out the countries which have the following type of government today :
 - (a) Monarchy
 - (b) Dictatorship