Democracy

Ours is a democratic country where everyone is equal before the law. Every citizen has the right to challenge anything that is unjust. Village panchayats are democratic institutions at the local level. They provide a forum for the people to discuss and decide on issues concerning their life in the village. In a democratic set-up there are many such institutions at various levels. You will learn about some such institutions in the next chapter.

The difference lies in the system of government existing in each country. There are different types of governments in the world. You will read about them later. India has a ‘democratic’ set-up which guarantees certain basic rights to all its people including the individual’s freedom to choose. Moreover, the rule of law makes everybody, irrespective of one’s social status, religion, caste or gender equal before the law. So what is democracy? How is it different from other forms of government?

FORMS OF GOVERNMENT

To understand what democracy is, we first need to have an idea about other forms of government. For instance, an absolute monarchy means the rule by a king or queen; and a dictatorship means the rule by an unelected, all-powerful dictator. As heads of state, both the monarch and the dictator have absolute powers and are above the law. They are not accountable to the people. As a form of government, democracy is very different from the rule of a king or a dictator. It stands for people’s rule. People are involved in the formation of government, directly or indirectly, through the elections. If the government is elected and run directly by the people, it is called direct democracy. This, however, may not be
practical today, especially in countries with a large population. In most countries, including India, people elect their representatives for a fixed term, who in turn form and run the government on behalf of the people. This is called indirect or representative democracy.

Unlike the monarchies, in most democracies the head of the country (President) is also elected by the people. Such countries are called republics. Thus, India is a ‘democratic republic’ because we have both the government and the head of the state or President elected by the people.

**MEANING OF DEMOCRACY**

Democracy implies the rule of the common people. It is derived from the Greek word *demokratia*, combining *demos* (common people) and *kratos* (power). In the previous pages, you have read about some of the major milestones in the development of democracy.

The meaning of democracy has changed with time. For instance, democracy in ancient Greece did not grant voting rights to women and slaves. The modern understanding of democracy started to take shape in the late eighteenth century. New Zealand became the first nation to grant equal voting rights to all its citizens as early as 1893. Things have changed rapidly since then. Most countries in the world today are democracies. They have granted equal voting rights to all their citizens.

Democracy is an ever-evolving concept. It accepts changes and assimilates new meanings as our understanding of equality and human rights grows with time.

---

**What makes democracy the most preferred choice of people across the world?**

**People’s power**

In the words of Abraham Lincoln, democracy is ‘a government of the people, by the people and for the people.’ The supreme power lies with the people. There is no authority superior to the people of the country. This power to govern is vested not in any particular class of people but in the community as a whole. It also implies that a democratic government should work for the welfare of all the people.

A country’s system of democracy works well only if the people freely participate in its governance. It means that everyone has the right and duty to participate in, directly or indirectly.

How do the citizens of a country participate in its government? In a democracy, an important means for people to exercise their political power are elections. All adult men and women vote to elect their representatives. In doing so, they are indirectly participating in the governance of the country. The elected ones take part in the government directly but on

---

**WORLD FOR DEMOCRACY**

Look at some of the recent people’s movements for democracy in different parts of the world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indonesian Revolution</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulldozer Revolution</td>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose Revolution</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange Revolution</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>2004–05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedar Revolution</td>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulip Revolution</td>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crimson Revolution</td>
<td>Tibet</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Spring</td>
<td>Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria</td>
<td>2010–11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What do the concepts ‘democratic society’ and ‘economic democracy’ mean?

Gopal and his family live in a hut outside the village because the villagers do not want this ‘low caste’ family to live in the village. Gopal works the whole day in the fields of his landlord, while his wife Devi does the domestic work at the landlord’s house. Despite their hard work, they get very unkind treatment from the landlord’s family. Sometimes they think that animals are better off than them!

At the time of elections, however, everything changes suddenly. The landlord and his party men go to their house and politely request them to vote for their candidate. This is one occasion in their life when Gopal and Devi feel they are recognized as humans. Again, when they see the ‘big’ people standing in a queue with them for casting a vote, for a moment Gopal and Devi feel that all humans are equal.

Once the elections are over, they go back to the same old life of humiliation. Life goes on...

What does democracy mean to people like Gopal? Although they live in a democratic country, can we say that they enjoy equality in real life?

behalf of the entire community. If people are not satisfied with their government, they can remove it in the next elections. People not only elect their government, but also control it. The policies of the government reflect the wishes of the people, that is, the public opinion.

Every citizen has a role to play in shaping the destiny of the country. Elections and public opinion are two important tools of democracy with which people can fulfil this responsibility.

Another important feature of democracy is the rule of law. It means that all are equal before the law. The President of a country and an ordinary citizen get the same protection of the law. It makes no distinction between the rich and the poor, or the educated and the uneducated. It also ensures that there is no one above the law. However powerful a person may be, she/he is bound by the law of the country. The rule of law also provides protection to individuals against social evils such as untouchability, child marriage, sati and other forms of discrimination. You have already seen an example of the working of the rule of law in the story of Susheela who fought the unlawful practice of child marriage.

Who makes laws for us? Unlike in an absolute monarchy or dictatorship where the king (queen) or the dictator is the lawgiver, in a democracy it is the people who make laws for themselves. It may be done directly by the people themselves or indirectly through their representatives. In our country, it is the Parliament, constituted by representatives of the people, which makes laws for us. Similarly, the State Assemblies make laws for the states.

Even if certain elements of democracy like the system of elections, public opinion, rule of law, etc. are present in a country, it may not yet be truly ‘democratic’ in the wider sense of the term. Why?

Democracy is not just a form of government alone. It is also a form of society and a form
of economy. In other words, the values of democracy such as justice, freedom and human dignity should be deeply embedded not only in the political system but also in the social and economic life of the people. The granting of the right to vote is not enough to establish democracy. There should be a democratic society and an economic democracy to make it really meaningful. Only then can we call it a complete democracy. It is very important for us to understand this wider meaning of democracy.

**Democratic society**

When people enjoy the right to elect and to remove their rulers, it is political democracy. But the social life of the people can still be filled with various forms of injustice. Thus, a democratic government becomes meaningful only if the society is democratic. In other words, there should be no discrimination of any kind in a democratic society. Evils like the caste system and untouchability spoil the democratic structure of society. All men and women should be treated equally. No one should enjoy more privileges than others on the basis of religion, caste, race or place of birth.

The caste system that existed in India gave rise to untouchability in the past. Although it has now been abolished by our Constitution, it had already created a wall between the so-called high castes and low castes. It not only divided our society but also deprived a large section of people of their basic rights. A democratic society should be able to remove all these social differences. Thus, a truly democratic government is possible only with a democratically-organized society.

**Economic democracy**

All members of the society should have equal economic opportunities. All should be free and self-reliant in matters of earning their livelihood. Does it mean that all should earn the same amount, or that all should live in the same type of houses, or that qualifications should not be of any consideration for getting employment? No. It only means that all should have equal opportunities to be employed or to set up their own businesses.

Economic democracy also means absence of all exploitation, that is, workers should not be exploited by owners, and peasants should not be exploited by landlords. Equal wages should be given for equal work. No distinction should be made between men and women. There can be no economic democracy if there is no fair distribution of wealth in the society. If wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, there can be no economic justice.

Democracy is based on two important principles—liberty and equality. Individual freedom and equal opportunities are necessary conditions for a democracy to be successful. Depriving someone of her or his means of livelihood goes against the very ideal of economic democracy. It denies one’s right to equal opportunities and economic growth. Thus, a democratic government will be meaningful only if its citizens are socially equal and economically free.
To Sum Up

- There are different types of governments in the world.
- India is a democratic republic because it has an elected President and a government run by the elected representatives of the people.
- In a democracy, elections are an important means for people to exercise their political power.
- Rule of law is an important feature of democracy. It means that all are equal before the law.
- Democracy is also a form of society and a form of economy.
- Evils like untouchability and the caste system spoil the democratic structure of society.
- Economic democracy means equal opportunities of employment for all.
- A democratic government will be meaningful only if its citizens are socially equal and economically free.

Time to Learn

A. Tick (✓) the correct answer.

1. Village panchayats are ________________ institutions at the local level.
   a. monarchical  b. democratic  c. dictatorial  d. military

2. ________________ means the rule by an unelected, all-powerful dictator.

3. In India, we have ________________ democracy.
   a. liberal  b. direct  c. consensus  d. indirect

4. Democracy implies rule of the ________________
   a. government  b. king  c. military  d. common people

5. ________________ and ________________ are two important tools of democracy with which people can shape the destiny of the country.
   a. Elections, public opinion  b. Rule of law, equality before the law  c. Fixed term, government  d. Village panchayats, local institutions

6. In India, the ________________ makes laws for us.
   a. government  b. Supreme Court  c. Parliament  d. Village panchayat

7. ________________ democracy is when people enjoy the right to elect and to remove their rulers.

8. There can be no ________________ democracy if there is no fair distribution of wealth in the society.
   a. political  b. social  c. economic  d. equal

B. Give very short answers for the following questions.

1. What do you understand by absolute monarchy? Name one country which follows this form of government.

2. What is direct democracy? Is it practical to follow it in India?
3. Why is India called a democratic republic?
4. What are the two principles on which democracy is based?

**C. Give short answers for the following questions.**
1. What is a village panchayat?
2. How do citizens in a democratic country participate in the government?
3. Explain why democracy is much more than just a form of government.

**D. Give long answers for the following questions.**
1. Write a note on elections.
2. What do you understand by rule of law?
3. What is a democratic society?
4. What is economic democracy?

5. Our Constitution guarantees certain basic rights to all its people. What is the purpose behind this?
6. What is more important in a democracy—all citizens should have equal voting rights or all citizens should have food, clothing and shelter?

---

**Time to Do**

E. Samuel and Melody are from two different countries. While Samuel lives in a democratic country, Melody lives in a country ruled by a monarch. They meet on a school exchange programme and become friends. Write an imaginary conversation between them in your notebook. Do not forget to highlight their feelings about the political set-up of their respective countries.

F. Do a research on any three non-democratic countries in the world. You can include the following points to make your research interesting. Based on your research make a presentation in the class.
   - Their geographical location
   - The present form of government in the countries
   - Movement for democracy in the countries, if any
   - Public opinion in the countries (whether the people are happy or unhappy with the present form of government)
   - Recent political developments in the countries

**G. Surfing Activity**
- To read some interesting facts about the world’s largest democracy visit [rsgr.in/sc0050](http://rsgr.in/sc0050)

---

**Life Skills**

H. Equality is one of the pillars of a democratic set-up. This means that no one is superior or inferior to another. However, very often we come across bullies who tease and harass those who they think are ‘weak’. But one should remember that one is ‘weak’ by choice, that is, the choice of not speaking up and facing the bully. Say ‘No’ to bullying.

* For more enrichment activities go to page 230