

Democracy

Manohar Kuse

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Abstract

This document has been written as a part of course term paper on the course titled “Human Values and Ethics” at The LNM Institute of Information Technology, Jaipur, by Prof. R. Sharan.

This documents explains the basic concept of democracy. It also goes on to compare democracy with other system. It gives information about various forms of democracy. Later a section is devoted to Indian Democracy as a case study of a particular form of democracy. Furthermore, problems of democracy have been highlighted.

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1 Democracy

Many hundred thousands of years ago, humans wandered as hunter-gatherers. These nomadic ancestors of ours moved from one place to another in search of food. Later on as the man learned to grow his own food by means of growing crops etc. Thus development of agriculture resulted in ever increasing population densities. Due to this increasing densities of populations interaction between groups of people increased and social pressure rose. Slowly structure with varying complexity began to take form. There became a necessity to maintain public order, basic security. Thus a organization called the government came into being. Later on there came various ideologies for the functioning of the government. In the sections to follow, we shall describe to the reader various aspects of “Democray” as a form of government, comparisons of it with other forms of governments. Also, ICT (Information and Communication Technology) which has come-up in modern times has played a role in shaping various aspects of governance.

1.1 Definition & Justification of Democracy

This section goes on to discuss the ideology of democracy. It also compares this ideology with other systems of governance.

In broad terms, the form of the government in which the governing power is derived from the people by means of elected representatives is termed as democracy. The “Majority Rule” is the characteristic feature of democracy. There are several varieties of democracy, some of which provide better representation and more freedoms for their citizens than others. One of the fundamental principle of democracy is division of power. Also equality and freedom are generally accepted principles of democracy. Furthermore, freedom of political expression, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press are also essential features of democratic system.

In the following paragraphs, we shall do in a bit more details about the forms of democracy. The major forms of democracy are described.

1.1.1 Representative Democracy

Selection of government officials by the people represented in the parliament is termed as representative democracy. The state in which, the head of state is also elected by electoral procedure is called the democratic republic. For example, in India, the head of the state (President) is elected by the representatives of Lok-Sabha (Parliament). And thus, India is called the “Republic of India”.

A characteristic of representative democracy is that while the representatives are elected by the people to act in their interest, they retain the freedom to exercise their own judgment as how best to do so.

1.1.2 Direct Democracy

Direct democracy is a political system where the citizens participate in the decision-making personally, contrary to relying on intermediaries or representatives. In a direct democracy the citizens have the power to change constitutional laws, put forth initiatives, referenda and suggestions for laws, give binding orders to elective officials.

Switzerland and a few states governments in the US follow direct form of democracy. However, we the world is yet to see a large working example of direct democracy.

1.1.3 Social Democracy

Social democracy has its roots from Marxist ideology. One of the popular way of thinking is – “Democracy cannot consist solely of elections that are nearly always fictitious and managed by rich landowners and professional politicians.”

The marxist view of the democracy states that, capitalist state cannot be democratic. Since, the government laws and decisions are often influenced by the rich capitalist. As of one of the definations of social democracy, it involves the electoral path to socialism. As in USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), has chosen a path to socialism by means of elected representatives.

1.2 Democracy in India

This section describes the particular form of democracy in practice in India. The democracy in India is a unique example in itself. It is the largest democracy in the World. The Constitution of Indian was enforced on 26 January, 1950. India became a democratic republic infused with the spirit of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. The Preamble, the Directive Principles of State Policy and the Fundamental Rights reflect the Indian ideology as well as the caste, creed, religion, property, or sex have the right to cast their vote.

After an election, the majority party or coalition forms the national government. The Prime Minister of India is identified as the head of government of the nation. The head of state i.e. The President of India is only a ceremonial head.

India has a federal form of government. The governance of India is based on a tiered system, where in the Constitution of India distributes the power on which each tier of government. However, the central government in India has greater power in relation to its states, and its central government is patterned after the British parliamentary system. In case of no majority to a particular party, the constitution has the right to impose president's rule in state. At the local level, "Panchayati Raj" system has the administrative functions.

Political parties are the vehicles of ideas. Parties act as the bridge between social thought and political decision in democracy. India being a multi-party system, various national political parties as well as regional parties exist. The major political parties in India are the Indian National Congress and Bhartiya Janta Party.

1.3 Problems of Democracy

The main thing that makes democracy wrong is the rule of majority. The basic flaw is that, it does not seek what is best for its citizens, rather it seeks what majority wants. Since, majority is what is required for a decision, it takes time to implement a policy. This thus hinders a rapid development.

Gradually politics has become a game of opportunism and corruption. Most political parties are only interested in coming to power. Such party adopts different caste politics and influence people in the name of religion and/or caste.

In since there is often free media in democratic systems, the media is very much influential. It sometimes creates a wrong impression among people about the government and situations. This freedom of media although beneficial sometimes creates a bane.

Since most democratic nations have an established jury systems, the decision of jury is often time taking and results are slow. This has led to lowering of confidence in the jury systems.

As per the marxist ideology, the rich play a role in influencing government policies. This has a given rise to political and economical inequality.

Despite the problems of democracy, it has been accepted by many countries of the world as the system of governance. As said by one of the author, if democracy is bad other systems are worst. Although there are a few disadvantages of democracy, there are much more advantages of it which would lead to a stable, peaceful and constructive society.