



Phases in the expansion of democracy

The Beginning: Modern democracy started more than 200 years ago with the uprising of the French Revolution of 1789. However, this was not secure or stable. During the next 100 years, democracy in France was overthrown and restored many times. This inspired many struggles for democracy in Europe. In Britain, the struggle for democracy started many years before the French Revolution. Through the 18th and 19th centuries, a series of political events slowly reduced the power of monarchy and nobles (feudal lords). The Right to Vote was granted to more and more people. The British colonies in North America declared themselves independent in 1776. In the next few years, these colonies came together to form the United States of America. They adopted a democratic Constitution in 1787, but the Right to Vote was limited to a very few men.

Universal Suffrage:

In the 19th century, struggles for democracy often centred around political equality, freedom and justice. One of the major demand was the right for every adult citizen to vote. Initially, many European countries who were becoming more democratic didn't allowed the voting rights to the people. In some countries only people owning property had the right to vote. Women oftenly were also not having voting right. In the United States of America, the blacks all over the country could not get the right to vote until 1965. Those struggling for democracy wanted this right granted universally to all adults — men or women, rich or poor, white or black. This is called 'universal adult franchise' or 'universal suffrage'.

End of Colonialism: Most Asian and African countries were under the control of European powers till the end of the Second World War 1945. Their people waged long struggles for independence. When they became independent, they wished to choose their own future leaders. India was one of the European colonies where people carried on a nationalist struggle to free themselves from colonial rule. Many of these countries became democracies immediately after their independence. India became independent in 1947. India had a good experience of the journey of transformation from a subject country to a democracy.

Experience of Ghana with Democracy: Ghana was a British colony, earlier known as Gold Coast. It was among the first countries in Africa to gain independence in 1957 and inspired other African countries to struggle for freedom. Kwame Nkrumah, an active member of the freedom struggle in the country, became the first Prime Minister of independent Ghana and then the President of Ghana. He was a friend of Jawaharlal Nehru and an inspiration for democrats in Africa. He got himself elected President for life. However, Ghana's government was overthrown by a military coup in 1966. Thus, it did not have a good Experience with democracy.

Recent Phase: From 1980 onwards, democracy was revived in many Latin American countries. The Soviet Union controlled many of its neighbouring communist countries in Eastern Europe. It disintegration accelerated the process of reviving democracy. Poland and several other countries became free from the control of the Soviet Union during 1989-90. When the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, all its constituent republics (15) emerged as independent countries. Thus, the end of Soviet Union's hegemony led to a big change in political map of the world.

Year	Country
1893	New Zealand
1917	Russia
1918	Germany
1919	Netherlands
1928	Britain
1931	Sri Lanka
1934	Turkey
1944	France
1945	Japan
1950	India
1951	Argentina
1952	Greece
1955	Malaysia
1962	Australia
1965	US
1978	Spain
1994	South Africa



Post-Independence Phases in Neighbouring Countries: During the 1980s and 1990s, many changes took place in the democracies of our neighbouring countries. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, transition from army rule to democracy took place in the 1990s. However, in 1999, General Musharraf brought back the army rule in Pakistan. In Nepal, the king gave up many of his powers - constitutional monarch to guide elected leader- new king of Nepal dismissed the elected govern— back political freedoms of people won in 1990's. Nepal is still struggling with its unexperienced democracy. This phase of transition is continuing in other countries of the world turning to democracy. By 2005, about 140 countries of the world were holding multi-party elections. After 1980, more than 80 non-democratic countries have made significant advances towards democracy. But still there are many countries where people are not free to express themselves. They can not elect their leaders and also are not free to take big decisions about their present and future life.

Struggle in Myanmar: Myanmar (previously known as Burma) gained freedom from colonial rule in 1948 and became a democracy. But the democratic rule ended in 1962 with a military coup. In 1990, elections were held for the first time after almost 30 years. The national League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won the elections. But the military leaders of Myanmar refused to recognize the election results.

The military government put the elected pro-democracy leaders including Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest. In Myanmar, the military accused political activists for most trivial offences and jailed them. If anyone was found issuing statements publicly against the regime, the person was sentenced to 20 years in prison. Due to such brutal and violent policies of the military-ruled Myanmar, around 6 to 10 lakh people left their country. Suu Kyi kept on fighting for democracy and freedom for her homeland. She spent a long time under house arrest. Her struggle has won international recognition. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. Yet the people in Myanmar are still struggling to establish a democratic government in their country.

Democracy at the global level: International Organisations

There are many international organisations which partially perform the functions of an International Government, though there is no single World Government. These organisations can make rules to limit power of governments, but cannot command countries and citizens the way governments can command.

The United Nations: The United Nations (UN) is a global association of nations of the world to help co-operation in international law, security, economic development and social equity. The UN Secretary General is its chief administrative officer. The UN Security Council, an organ of the UN, is responsible for maintaining peace and security among countries. It can put together an international army and take action against the wrongdoer. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank lend money to governments when they need it. Before lending money, they ask the government to show all its accounts and make some changes in its economic policy.

Are these decisions democratic? Different institutions or organisations perform some of the functions at world level which would be performed by a world government. These organisations are really democratic or not. In other words, these organisations give equal worth to the say of each country or not. To know this fact, some organisations are examined below:

- Every one of the 193 member states (as on 1st September, 2012) of the UN has one vote in the UN General Assembly. It meets in regular yearly sessions, under a President elected from among the representatives of the member countries.

9th – Democracy in the Contemporary World II



- The fifteen-member Security Council of the UN takes such crucial decisions which the General Assembly cannot take. The Council has five permanent members; namely USA, Russia, UK, France and China. Ten other members are elected by the General Assembly for 2 year terms. The real power is with five permanent members. Each permanent member has a veto power. Thus, the council cannot implement a decision if any permanent member denies it. This system led more countries to demand more democracy in the UN.
- International Monetary Fund (IMF) is one of the biggest moneylenders in the world. Its 188 members do not have equal voting rights. More than 54 per cent of the voting power in the IMF is in the hands of only ten countries, viz, USA, Japan, Germany, France, UK, China, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Canada and Russia.
- The World Bank has a similar system of voting. The President of this organisation has always been a citizen of the USA and he is nominated by the Treasury Secretary (Finance Minister) of the USA Government.

Role of International Organisations in Democracy: Most of the global institutions are not properly democratic. From the above points, it is clear that nations are becoming more democratic than they were before, while international organisations are becoming less democratic. In past years, there were two big powers in the world—the USA and the Soviet Union. Competition and conflict between them helped to keep a certain balance in all the global organisations. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union (1991), the US became the only superpower, which severely affects the working of international organisations.

From the above facts, we understand that there is a move towards global democracy and it is from people who get more opportunities to come in contact with one another.

Over the last few years, the people of different countries have formed global organisations against war and domination of the world by a few countries and business companies. However, the initiative for democracy among nations has come from the struggles of the people.

Promotion of democracy: Some powerful countries have taken on the duty of promotion of democracy in many parts of the world and the USA is the most prominent in this task. They suggested that by promoting only the values of democracy is not enough. Existing democracies should directly intervene in countries that are non-democratic to establish democracy there.

The Case of Iraq: Iraq is a country in Western Asia which became independent from British rule in 1932. Three decades later, Iraq faced a series of coups by military officers. Arab Socialist Ba'ath party (the Arabic word Ba'ath means renaissance) under the leadership of Saddam Hussein played a key role in the 1968 coup and captured power.

Significantly, this government abolished traditional Islamic law and gave women the Right to Vote and several freedoms which were not granted even in other West Asian countries.

After becoming the President of Iraq in 1979, Saddam Hussein ran a dictatorial government and was known to kill his political opponents and ethnic minorities.

Removal of Saddam Hussein: Although Iraq was ruled by Saddam Hussein for a long time, the USA and its allies (e.g., Britain) 2003, alleging that he possessed weapons of 'mass destruction', which posed a big danger to the world. However, no such weapons were found there by UN team. The USA installed an interim government in Iraq which was of its preference. It did not even take the UN Security Council for this, although they were required to do so. Kofi Annan, the then UN Secretary General, said that the US war on Iraq was illegal. Thus democracy in its true sense is not being followed even today.

