

9th – Why democracy?



Debating Merits of Democracy: Democracy is popular and many newly independent nations are becoming democracies. But we should also understand its merits and demerits. Real democracy should be compared with real forms of other modes of government like monarchy, dictatorship or others. First, we will discuss why we should not have democracy.

Arguments against Democracy:

1. Leaders keep changing in a democracy. This leads to instability.
2. Democracy is all about political competition and power play. There is no scope for morality.
3. Many people have to be consulted in a democracy which leads to delays.
4. Elected leaders do not always know the best interests of the people which leads to bad decisions.
5. Democracy leads to corruption, for it is based on electoral competition.
6. Ordinary people do not know what is good for them; they should not decide anything.
7. Democracy leads to frequent change in leadership. Sometimes this can set back big decisions and affect the government's efficiency.
8. Democracy is not a magical solution for all problems. It has not ended poverty in our country and in other parts of the world. It ensures that people can take their decisions. But this does not guarantee that their decisions will be good. People can make mistakes.

Dictatorship: A form of government in which a person or a group of persons possesses absolute power without effective constitutional limitations.

Morality: Principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong.

The above mentioned arguments show that democracy may not be the ideal form of government.

An example: Comparing Democracies of India and China

The worst recorded famine in the world was the 1958-1961 China's famine. In this around 3 crore people died. During the same period, the economic condition of India was similar to that of China, but India did not have any kind of famine. According to economists, this was due to different government policies in India and China.

As India is a democratic country, its government responded differently to food scarcity. Due to this, no large-scale famine has ever affected independent China. If China too had free press, opposition party, etc like India to criticize the government, so many people would not have died in the famine.

The example tells why democracy is considered as the best form of government.

Arguments for Democracy:

1. Democracy is better than any other form of government in responding to the needs of the people. A democracy requires that the rulers have to attend to the needs of the people.
2. A democratic government is a better government because it is a more accountable form of government.
3. Democracy is based on consultation and discussion. Any decision is taken after discussion, which reduces the possibility of taking rash and irresponsible decisions. Thus, democracy improves the quality of decision-making.
4. Democracy provides a method to deal with differences and conflicts. Only in a democracy different groups can live one another peacefully. In a diverse country

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like India where people are from different religion and language democracy keeps our country together.

5. The strongest argument for democracy is that democracy enhances the dignity of citizens. In democracy, the poorest and the least educated have the same status as the rich and the educated, because democracy is based on the principle of political equality.

6. Democracy is better than other forms of government because it allows us to correct our own mistakes. There is no form of government who can guarantee that no mistake can be made. But in democracy such mistake cannot be hidden.

There is a space for public discussion on the mistakes and there is a room for correction. In democracy, either the rulers have to change their decisions or the rulers can be changed.

Conclusion: From the above arguments in favour of democracy, we can conclude that democracy cannot give us everything, but is clearly better than any other form of government. It is likely to respect people's own wishes and allows different kinds of people to live together. If democracy fails to do some of these things, there is always a way to rectify its mistakes.

Broader meanings of democracy: The most common form of democracy is representative democracy. In this, the representatives, or a majority of them, are allowed to take decisions on behalf of all the people. In other words, the majority of people rule through their elected representatives. It is so because:

- Modern democracies involve such a large number of people that it is physically impossible for them to sit together and take collective decisions.
- Even if they could, the citizen does not have the time, the desire or the skills to take part in all the decisions.

From the above facts, we can distinguish between democracies and non-democracies, but cannot distinguish between a bad democracy and a good democracy. Sometimes we use the term 'democracy' for organisations other than the government also.

Democratic Decision- Making: A democratic decision involves consultation with and consent of all those people who are affected by that decision. Powerful and non-powerful people should have the same say in taking the decisions. This can apply to a government or a family or any other organisation.

Thus, democracy is a principle that can be applied to any sphere of life and can take many forms. Sometimes we use the word democracy not to describe any existing government, but to establish an ideal standard that all democracies must aim to become. In a democracy, every citizen must be able to play an equal role in decision-making. For this, an equal right to vote is not sufficient. Every citizen needs to have equal information, basic education, equal resources and a lot of commitment. If we take these ideals seriously, then no country in the world is a perfect democracy. Every democracy has to try to realise the ideals of democratic decision-making. It cannot be achieved once and for all. It requires a constant effort to save and strengthen democratic forms of decision-making.

The work, attitude and view of citizens are the major elements in making their country more or less democratic.

The fate of the country depends not just on what the rulers do, but mainly on what the citizens do. Democracy depends on active political participation by all the citizens. Thus, a study of democracy must focus on democratic politics.