
UNIT 21 DIRECT AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Structure

- 21.0 Objectives
- 21.1 Introduction: Meaning of Democracy
 - 21.1.1 Various Meanings
 - 21.1.2 Linking Government to the People
- 21.2 What is Direct Democracy?
 - 21.2.1 Principles governing Direct Democracy
 - 21.2.2 Merits of Direct Democracy
- 21.3 Greek Democracy as Direct Democracy
 - 21.3.1 Athenian Democracy: Reasons for its Fame
 - 21.3.2 Aristotle's 'The Politics'
- 21.4 Limitations of Direct Democracy
 - 21.4.1 Flaws of Athenian Democracy
- 21.5 Direct Democracy in Modern Times
- 21.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 21.7 Some Useful References
- 21.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

21.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will learn about direct (ancient) and participatory (modern) democracy. After going through the unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the meaning of democracy;
- Distinguish between its various forms such as direct and participatory;
- Examine the strengths and weaknesses of different forms.

21.1 INTRODUCTION: MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy is both a form of government and an ideal, an aspiration and a standard. The core element of democracy is self-rule. The origin of the term democracy can be traced back to ancient Greece. Derived from the Greek word '*demokratia*', it means rule by the people. In the literal sense, it rejects the separation of the two, i.e., between the ruler and the ruled. It is interesting to note that unlike the terms communism and socialism, which have a point of reference in Marxism, democracy has not been associated with a specific doctrinal source or ideology. Infact, it is a byproduct of the entire development of Western civilization and therefore, tends to be used rather loosely. Thus, the history of the idea of democracy is rather complex and is marked by conflicting and confusing conceptions. It is confusing because "this is still an active history" and also because the issues are complex. However, it has been justified and defended on the grounds that it achieves one or more of the following fundamental value or goods like equality, liberty, moral self-development, the common interest, private interests, social utility etc.

21.1.1 Various Meanings

Varied meanings have been attached to the word ‘democracy’. Some of them are as follows:

- A form of government in which people rule directly;
- A society based on equal opportunity and individual merit, rather than hierarchy and privilege;
- A system of decision-making based on the principle of majority rule;
- A system of rule that secures the rights and interests of minorities by placing checks upon the power of the majority;
- A means of filling public offices through a competitive struggle for the popular vote;
- A system of government that serves the interests of the people regardless of their participation in political life (Heywood, 1997:66).
- A system of government based on the consent of the governed.

21.1.2 Linking Government to the People

From the different meanings that are associated with democracy, one thing that becomes clear is that democracy links government to the people. However, this link can be forged in a number of ways depending upon the larger political culture of that society. Due to this, there have been ideological differences and political debates regarding the exact nature of democratic rule. Nonetheless, any discussion on democracy tends to address three important questions:

- Who are the people
- In what sense the people rule
- How far should popular rule extend (Heywood, 1997:66)

Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What do you understand by democracy?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2) Enumerate some of the various meanings of democracy.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

21.2 WHAT IS DIRECT DEMOCRACY?

Direct Democracy is a form of self-government in which all collective decisions are taken through participation of all adult citizens of the state in the spirit of equality and open deliberations. Deliberations or discussions are important because decisions arrived at through discussions are better informed, logical and rational. This is because discussions allow a group to reconcile different interests, inform members about various issues and draw on the group's expertise. In other words, debates enable people to both influence and to be influenced by the group (Hague et al 1998:20). According to the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, the important aspect of direct democracy is the mechanism that "all command each and each in his turn all". It was achieved in ancient Athens through a form of government brought about as a result of a mass meeting. Its modern manifestation is the referendum. 'Gram Sabha', as envisaged in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, is an instance of direct democracy in rural India.

21.2.1 Principles governing Direct Democracy

In a direct democracy, therefore, the best decisions can never be arrived at through voting. The principle of direct democracy is to govern through consensus, which emerges from careful deliberations of options or alternatives. In the absence of formal representative institutions, people make decisions themselves through public discussions. In other words, the following principles apply in direct democracy:

- People are sovereign
- Sovereignty is inalienable and cannot be represented
- People must express their general will and make decisions directly through referenda
- Decisions are to be based on majority rule

To sum up direct democracy is based on direct, unmediated and continuous participation of citizens in the tasks of government. It obliterates the distinction between government and the governed and between state and civil society. In direct democracy, state and society become one. It is a system of popular self-government.

21.2.2 Merits of Direct Democracy

The merits of direct democracy include the following:

- It heightens the control that citizens can exercise over their own destinies, as it is the only pure form of democracy.
- It creates a better informed and more politically sophisticated citizenry, and thus it has educational benefits.
- It enables the public to express their own views and interests without having to rely on self-serving politicians
- It ensures that rule is legitimate in the sense that people are more likely to accept decisions that they have made themselves.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What do you understand by direct democracy?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2) What are the merits of a direct democracy?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

21.3 GREEK DEMOCRACY AS DIRECT DEMOCRACY

The classic example of a direct democracy is that of ancient Athens during the 4th century BC. It can be considered as the only pure or ideal system of popular participation known so far. It had a specific kind of direct popular rule in which all-important decisions were taken through mass meetings. The Assembly or *Ecclesia* to which all citizens belonged made all major decisions. This assembly met at least 40 times a year to settle issues put before it. When full time public officials were required, they were chosen on the basis of lots. This process was adapted to ensure that they were a part of the larger body of citizens. The posts were, however, not fixed and were rotated in quite a frequency so that all citizens gained experience in the art of governing and thus, tried to achieve the broadest possible participation. A council consisting of 500 citizens acted as the executive or steering committee of the assembly and a 50 strong committee in turn made proposals to the council.

21.3.1 Athenian Democracy: Reasons for its Fame

It is important to understand what made Athenian democracy so remarkable. Athens, infact, symbolized a new political culture enfranchising the whole citizenry. The citizens not only participated in regular meetings of the assembly, but they were in large numbers, prepared to undertake the responsibilities of public office and decision-making. Formally, citizens were differentiated on the basis of rank and wealth in their involvement in public affairs. The demos held sovereign power, i.e., supreme authority to engage in legislative and judicial activities (Held, 1987:17). The Athenian concept of citizenship entailed taking a share in this function, participating directly in the affairs of the state.

Athenian democracy was marked by a general commitment to the principle of civic virtue which actually meant commitment and dedication to the republican city-state, the subordination of private life to public affairs and the achievement of common good. In other words, there was no separation of public and private life and individuals

could attain self-fulfillment and live an honorable life “in and through the polis”, i.e. the city-state. For example, citizens had rights and obligations but not as private individuals, rather as members of the political community. There were, thus, public rights and good life was possible only in the polis. Thus, according to Robert Dahl, “In the Greek vision of democracy, politics is a natural social activity not sharply separated from the rest of life. Rather political life is only an extension of and harmonious with oneself”. (Dahl, 1989:18). It seems that the Athenians believed in a “free and open” political life in which citizens could develop and realize their capacities and skill and the *telos* (goal or objective) of the common good. And justice meant securing and realization of the citizen’s role and place in the city-states (Held, 1987: 18).

21.3.2 Aristotle’s ‘The Politics’

We find the most detailed and remarkable account of ancient democracy in Aristotle’s famous work *The Politics* which was written between 335 and 323 BC. His work analyses the claims, ethical standards and aims of democracy and states distinctly, the key features of a number of Greek democracies. According to him, liberty and equality are linked together, particularly if you claim to be a democrat. Without the existence of one, the other is difficult to achieve. There are two criteria of liberty: a) to rule and in turn being ruled, and b) living as one chooses. If one wants to execute the first criterion as an effective principle of government, it is necessary that all citizens are equal. Without numerical equality, it is not possible for the majority to be sovereign. Numerical equality here means that everyone has an equal share in the art of ruling. The classical or the earlier democrats felt that numerical equality was possible to achieve because a) citizens are paid for their participation in government and therefore, are not losers because of their political involvement, b) citizens have equal voting power and c) in principle, everyone has an equal opportunity to hold office. In a nutshell, what we can understand from this is, that equality is the practical basis of liberty and it is also the moral basis. Thus, on the basis of Aristotle’s account, classical democracy including direct democracy entails liberty and liberty entails equality.

Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
 ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Why is the Athenian Democracy considered remarkable?

.....

2) Briefly examine Aristotle’s views as given in ‘The Politics’.

.....

21.4 LIMITATIONS OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY

A distinctive feature of direct democracy as practiced in ancient Athens was its exclusivity. The City-State was marked by unity, solidarity, participation and a highly restricted citizenship. As mentioned before, there was no separation between public and private life and even though state and government were inextricably linked with the lives of the citizens, it only involved a small section of the population. It is interesting to note that the Athenian political culture was an adult male culture, i.e. only men over the age of 20 years were qualified to become citizens. It was a democracy of patriarchs in which women had no political rights and even their civic rights were strictly limited. There were also other types of residents who were ineligible to participate in formal proceedings; like ‘immigrants’ who had settled in Athens several generations earlier, but were not the original inhabitants. However, the slave population constituted, by far, the most politically marginalized people. Here, what we find is that ‘political equality’ as practiced in Athens did not mean ‘equal power’ for all. It was rather a form of equality that was applicable to those having equal status and in the Athenian context, it was meant for only males and Athenian born. Thus, many were a minority of the larger citizenry (Finley, 1983). Unquestionably, the politics of ancient Athens rested on a highly undemocratic base.

21.4.1 Flaws of Athenian Democracy

What we can conclude from the above description is that democracy practiced by ancient Athens had serious flaws. If modern democracy is based on the market economy, Athens was a democracy built on slavery; the labour of slaves created the time for the citizen elite to participate. The lack of permanent bureaucracy contributed to ineffective government, leading eventually to the fall of the Athenian republic after defeat in war. It is interesting to note that the most influential critic of this form of democracy i.e. direct democracy was the philosopher Plato. Plato attacked the principle of political equality on the grounds that the masses are not made equal by nature and therefore, cannot rule themselves wisely. This is because they possess neither the wisdom nor the experience to do so. The solution, according to him, as stated in his famous work *The Republic* was that the government be placed in the hands of a class of philosopher-kings, the Guardians, whose rule would be something similar to what can be called enlightened dictatorship. At a practical level, however, the principal drawback of Athenian democracy was that it could operate only by excluding the mass of the population from political activity. This was possible only in small city-states with limited populations and not in larger modern democracies with bigger populations as they exist today. Despite its flaws, the Athenian model was crucial in establishing the democratic principle. According to Finer, “The Greeks invented two of the most potent political features of our present age: they invented (a) the very idea of citizen as opposed to subject and (b) they invented democracy.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Discuss the limitations of a direct democracy. Give a suitable example.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

21.5 DIRECT DEMOCRACY IN MODERN TIMES

The classical model of direct and continuous popular participation in political life has been kept alive in certain parts of the world, notably in township meetings of New England in the USA and in communal assemblies which operate in smaller Swiss cantons. The most common method used in recent times is referendum as compared to the mass meetings of ancient Athens. Referendum is a vote in which the electorate can express a view on a particular issue of public policy. It differs from an election in that the latter is essentially a means of filling a public office and does not provide a direct or reliable method of influencing the content of a policy. A device of direct democracy, referendum is used not to replace representative institutions, but to supplement them. They may either be advisory or binding; they may also raise issues for discussions (propositions or plebiscites).

21.6 LET US SUM UP

Broadly speaking, the term democracy means rule by the people. However, varied meanings have been associated with it over a period of time. Debates about the nature of democracy have tended to focus on three important questions. First, to what extent should political power be distributed. Secondly, should the people in effect rule themselves or should the government be left in the hands of elected representatives. Thirdly, is it appropriate to decide collectively through the use of democratic process? In direct democracy as originated and practiced in ancient Greece, citizens make decisions themselves, without representative institutions. This interpretation stresses the value of public discussion, both for the participants and for the quality of decisions. This model of democracy has serious limitations and, therefore, is not a popular form of government in modern times.

21.7 SOME USEFUL REFERENCES

Dahl, R., *Democracy and Its Critics*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989

Finley, M.I., *Politics in the Ancient World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Hague R. et. al., *Comparative Government and Politics: An Introduction* London: Macmillan Press, 1998

Held David, *Models of Democracy*, Oxford: Polity Press; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Heywood Andrew, *Politics*, London: Macmillan Press, 1997

21.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 21.1
- 2) See sub-section 21.1.1

Democracy

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 21.2
- 2) See sub-section 21.2.2

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See sub-section 21.3.1
- 2) See sub-section 21.3.2

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See Section 21.4



UNIT 23 SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY

Structure

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 Democracy and Contemporary Socialism: A Conceptual Framework
- 23.3 Western Liberal Democracy
- 23.4 Non-western Forms of Democracy
- 23.5 Socialist Democracy
- 23.6 Four Basic Tendencies of Socialism: The Essence of Socialist Democracy
 - 23.6.1 Democratic Techniques and Socialism
 - 23.6.2 Trend towards Democratic Socialism
 - 23.6.3 Democratic Socialism in England
- 23.7 Broad Principles
- 23.8 New Leftism: Attack on Soviet Marxism
- 23.9 Challenges/Difficulties in the Implementation of Socialism through Democratic Procedures
- 23.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.11 Key Words
- 23.12 Some Useful References
- 23.13 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

23.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, democracy is discussed as a form of government with socialistic principles and policy. Democracy is a way of life and represents a set of ideals. It is asserted that true democracy is socialistic and true socialism is democratic. The link between democracy and socialism is the most important single element in socialistic thought and policy. After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the varied connotations / interpretations of democracy;
- Explain the difference between features of a liberal western democracy and socialist democracy;
- Define the concepts of Democratic Socialism and New Leftism; and
- Describe the methods adopted for the establishment of a new social order

23.1 INTRODUCTION

The term democracy indicates both a set of ideals and a political system, a feature it shares with the terms communism and socialism. 'Democracy' is harder to pin down, however, than either 'Socialism' or 'Communism', for while the latter labels have found in Marxism an ideological matrix, democracy has never become identified with a specific doctrinal source—it is rather a by-product of the entire process of liberalization of Western civilization. Not every political system claims to be a socialist system, but even the communist system claims to be democratic. Social democracy

is generally conceived as an endogenous state and style of society, and should, therefore, not be confused with 'Socialist Democracy' which is a policy enforced by the state upon society.

If we look into the history of socialism, we would find that successful socialist movements have grown up only in nations with strong democratic traditions, such as Great Britain, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Australia etc. This is so because, where democratic constitutional government is generally accepted, socialists concentrate on certain programme like creation of opportunities for the underprivileged classes ending inequality, opening educational opportunities, ending discriminatory practices, regulation of economy for the benefit of all, and finally the proposal to rebuild society based on cooperation instead of competition.

In this unit, we will attempt to make a comparative estimate between Western liberal democracy and socialist democracy, outline the tenets of democratic socialism and the ideology of New Leftism which has a socialist module, and finally understand, the imperativeness of socialist democracy for especially, developing and underdeveloped nations.

23.2 DEMOCRACY AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIALISM: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Let us first examine the concept of modern democracy before Karl Marx. It is important to note that his close associate Friedrich Engels does not speak about democracy, but always about pure democracy. By this he meant a bourgeois state, in which general suffrage prevails, but private property is not touched. It meant that it was either possible to erect a socialist state directly after the overthrow of feudal and military monarchy or pure democracy, that is the bourgeoisie capitalistic republic, would first come into power. At that time, people came to accept a democratic state, as a bourgeoisie state governed by a method of general suffrage.

When Marx began his political activities, he found democracy to be already a great international movement. The history of European democracy extended back two and a half millennia. In the republics of ancient Greece, the political form of democracy was the contract to aristocracy or oligarchy, to the rule of the "minority" of the rich or noble. In contrast to this, democracy was the rule of majority, of the masses in general, whereby the owners of property or the bearers of nobility had no privilege to claim. Greek political science already occupied itself with the question, whether every state in which will of the majority of citizens decides is a democracy, no matter what the composition of this majority is and how it arises or whether a definite class character belongs to a democracy. Aristotle answered the question thus: that democracy is nothing more than the rule of poor in the state; just as oligarchy is the rule of the rich.

In the middle ages, democratic forms showed themselves in urban communes. During transition to modern times, the radical religious sects became the bearers of democratic ideas. Thus, democratic masses and their leaders were united in a distrust of modern development, and their view that both republic and democracy were primarily a moral matter, a moral renewal of the human race, already contained a condemnation of modern economic and social development.

Today, the democratic ideal is more than a mere composite of individualism, socialism and nationalism. It is based upon the acceptance and promotion of characteristics of life of each group of men, thus uniting individualism with a form of regionalism or nationalism and on the other hand, it implies an organization of any one group, which is less homogenous than that implied in the earlier forms of socialism. For democracy, implies a freedom of voluntary association and the performance by such associations of many functions which the earlier socialists would have left to the state.

Democracy is to begin with a principle of legitimacy. Power is legitimate only when it is derived from authority of the people and based upon their consent. From a normative standpoint, the definition of democracy strictly derives from the literal meaning of the term-“Power of the people”. It is identified positively by the existence of developed representative institutions and by the establishment of constitutional government. It presupposes not a direct exercise of power, but delegation of power; that is a system of ‘control’ and ‘limitation’ of government. From the time the term ‘demokratia’ was coined in the fifth century B.C until roughly a century ago, democracy was used as a political concept. Tocqueville was struck, however, by the social aspect of American democracy and we thus speak of ‘social democracy’. Marxism has popularized the expression ‘economic democracy’ and guild socialism; Webb’s book ‘*Industrial Democracy*’ (1897) has given currency to the label ‘industrialist democracy’. The labels people’s democracy, soviet democracy and the like, pose a special democracy. When the socialist movement revived in Europe in the late 1860’s, most socialist leaders were under the influence of Marxism. In 1881, the German Social Democratic Party and in 1897 the Swedish Democratic Social Party, accepted public ownership of all means of production, distribution and exchange as their objectives. Other socialist parties adopted the same objectives in their constitutions or manifestoes, and even the British labour movement, which had not accepted socialism till 1918, adapted to some extent the aim of public ownership.

Now after a lapse of a little over three decades from the end of the Second World War, the picture is different. In all developed democratic countries of the West, except Italy and France, communist parties have been reduced to nullities, and even the Italian and French communist parties have been diminishing in strength. In the communist countries of Eastern Europe, there are growing revisionist tendencies while in Russia itself, there appears to be an increasing acceptance of Khrushchev’s dictum that it is possible for communist parties to ignore the question of means. On the other hand, social democratic parties have grown in strength in all European countries. They have either been in power or have formed the main opposition. They no longer seek to replace the whole capitalist order by an economy based on public ownership of means of production, distribution or exchange. They are reconciled to a mixed economy accompanied by full employment and social security. The authors of ‘twentieth century’ socialism have stressed that socialism should be defined in terms of basic values of equality, freedom and fellowship and not in terms of any particular means by which those values may be realized. Similar changes have taken place in the programs of all European Socialists – these parties are taking a much more discriminating attitude towards public ownership; however, social democracy supports the public demand that it is necessary to safeguard important public interests.

Thus, the socialists in the underdeveloped world can draw some valuable lessons from a survey of these changes in the fortunes of communism and social democracy in Western countries and the altered objectives of social democratic parties.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What do you understand by democracy?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 2) In what manner has the perception of democracy changed in erstwhile Communist countries?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

23.3 WESTERN LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Modern liberal conception of politics acquired a realistic, pragmatic, secular and scientific orientation. State became the pivotal political organization. Rousseau introduced the idea of popular sovereignty and democracy. It was established that within the reach of the people, institutions such as state, government and semi-official institutions etc began to be treated as centers of political activity. Rights of private property, and individual liberty began to be asserted. In the advanced liberal concept, the state is viewed as a positive welfare organ. Liberal democracy assured a competitive party model as essential to represent the wishes of people. This involves eliciting people’s opinion through periodic elections to legislatures. Further, government is seen as limited and as operating in a world of voluntary associations. Society is viewed as pluralistic, which means that it is composed of autonomous sections and associations. Hence, government sets out to rule in common interest.

Western liberal democracy is a political theory that emerged in Europe during the seventeenth century and has continued to this day as one of the dominant theories and ideologies in the world. This excludes the socialist countries with dictatorships of different kinds. In the development of this concept, mention must be made of John Locke, Jeremy Bentham and J.S Mill. Locke contributed the ideas of limited government, constitutionalism, individual rights and the rule of law. Bentham’s contribution lay in the utilitarian conception of majority interest calculated in terms of individual utility. Mill contributed the idea of individual liberty, plurality of opinions, and the principle of development of individual personality.

When we define the liberal state to be politically democratic, we should note that it refers not only to the electoral process, but also to aspects like the rule of law and right to property. In a liberal system without any written constitution such as in the United Kingdom, this means the law enacted by parliament is supreme. And the property rights granted in liberal democratic states prevent the government from making drastic changes in economic matters. This is the reason that the radical view criticizes liberal democracy, for not laying emphasis on economic equality. They called themselves people’s democracy, which implies that the means of production are socially owned.

Thus, the above gives a fairly good picture of liberal conception of democracy which is based on a number of assumptions; first, it holds that an individual is endowed with an autonomous mind, reason and will; that is, he is a rational being. So, he can decide what is best for him. Second, the individual is a moral being, which means that they

are all equal. Each one should have an equal opportunity to participate in politics. Third, truth is relative and multi-dimensional and is not absolute. Therefore, at a particular moment, truth can be established only through a free inter-play of ideas. That, tolerance is the essence of democracy was strongly argued by Mill in 'On Liberty'. Truth in a democracy implies that every one can participate in politics and it is the government of all people; therefore, a democratic government acts in the interest of all. Competition among leaders and parties ensures popular control over government and maximum liberty for individuals. Rule of law, equality before law and basic minimum rights are characteristics of a Western liberal democracy.

23.4 NON-WESTERN FORMS OF DEMOCRACY

It may be surprising to some that countries like the erstwhile USSR (Soviet Russia), Communist China, North Korea and North Vietnam, to name but a few, claim to be democratic. Indeed, they claim to be the only true democracies. In order to understand that exact nature of this claim, it is important to go back to Marx. He believed that the politics of the West was characterized by class conflicts, and that competition between parties would be no more once the feud between classes ended. True democracy he thought, would exist only where one class predominated, embodying the overwhelming mass of the people. All other forms of democracy were denounced as bourgeois. If a power conflict existed on a competitive basis, so that it might be influenced by wealth, Marx considered that democracy to be bourgeois, and therefore, unworthy of any name.

Competitive politics is condemned by communists for being a fraud. They themselves claim to have no other classes because they say that all the exploiting groups were eradicated in the early days of the Russian revolution. Soviet lawyers and political apologists argue that the West's version of democracy is a sham and fraud because of the existence of an economic system- Capitalism- which favors the rich.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What are the salient features of Western liberal democracy?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) What do you understand by non-western forms of democracy?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

23.5 SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY

In the west where capitalism has prevailed, this takes the form of accommodation of progressive dilution of the socialist principle. We all know what socialism is. In company with other ideological concepts, socialism has a double reference. On one hand, it refers to the ideals, values, properties of what is often called the socialist vision. On the other hand, it refers to empirical features of social and political institutions which embody the vision. At the level of values, the important ones are those of freedom, equality, community, brotherhood, social justice, a classless society, co-operation, progress, peace, prosperity, abundance and happiness. Sometimes, the value components are stated negatively: socialists are opposed to oppression, exploitation, inequality, strife, war, injustice, poverty, misery and dehumanization. At the level of institutions, the adherents and opponents alike would say that socialism is opposed to capitalist private enterprise system, which it seeks to replace by a system of control over wealth and property and the social supervision of organization of economic activity; this is summarized in the formula, the common or public ownership of means of production.

Names in political discourse have shown themselves to be unstable over times. John Ruskin, for example, proudly called himself a communist, while he repudiated socialism, republicanism and democracy. For H.M Hyndman, the term socialism denoted mild, Christian-liberal do-goodery, while the term social democracy meant for him militant Marxism. Today, of course, the opposite would be the case. It was Proudhon, not Marx and Engels, who first called his doctrine 'scientific socialism'. Bakunin, at one time, held an organization which was called the Alliance for Socialist Democracy. Marx himself in his youth dismissed communism as being only an "imperfect realization of socialism"; later Marxian usage became more systematic, though never entirely free from ambiguity.

23.6 FOUR BASIC TENDENCIES OF SOCIALISM: THE ESSENCE OF SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY

An attempt is made in this unit to give a more systematic outline to the tendencies, which together make up socialist thought, reflected in the concept of socialist democracy. *Egalitarianism* is the first tendency, which is the classical principle of socialism. The dominant notion of equality culminates in a conception of community. Politically, egalitarianism obviously demands complete democracy, but democracy in its simple, classical, unitary sense, without enduring party divisions.

Moralism, the next tendency, constitutes the Christian principle of socialism; that is, it stresses on high ideals which seek to bring justice by replacing enmity with mutual help, and fostering feelings of brotherly love and understandings among human beings. The political form most harmonious with moralist values is, again democracy, perhaps tempered by mild notions of paternalism and certainly presupposing a sense of moderation and responsibility on the part of individual principles. Small and large communities governed by a majoritarian system are fitting vehicles for the realization of the moralist ideal.

Rationalism is the third tendency, in representing the principle of enlightenment. Here, the chief values are individual happiness, reason, knowledge, efficiency in production and the rational purposeful organization of human society in the interest of progress. The political form that rationalism leads towards is also democracy, since this tendency tends to acknowledge the fundamental equality of human beings and believes in self-sufficiency of individual human reason. It believes, however, that

democracy should be tempered with meritocracy, constant guidance by experts, scientists, technicians, and intellectual people who are to be trusted with the promotion of general happiness.

Libertarianism, which could be termed the romantic principle of socialism, is the last of the basic tendencies in the sense that it is extreme and radical among socialist principles. It centers on the ideal freedom, in the sense of total absence of restraint, internal and external. Here, it would be difficult to talk in terms of a favored political arrangement, since this tendency would repudiate politics in toto. Anarchy is what comes nearest to its ideal; but again libertarianism too goes with the acceptance of equality in a fundamental sense. Libertarianism is the gentlest and the most tolerant of socialist tendencies.

These are the four tendencies of socialism, which reflect the essence of socialist democracy. The relative weight of each tendency, however, varies from case to case. In other words, we find that one or another tendency assumes predominance over others in the case of a given country, doctrine, movement or historical period. This is why the predominance of libertarianism in the Western New left is in a large part due to the increasing moderation and integration of social democracy.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What are the salient features of a socialist democracy?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2) What do you understand by egalitarianism?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

23.6.1 Democratic Techniques and Socialism

The rise of fascism in Europe and the continuance of dictatorship of the Communist Party in erstwhile Soviet Union also led many socialists during the thirties to give increasing attention to the techniques of democracy under a collectivist regime. While the socialist movement in general had for many years maintained that collectivism without democracy was a far cry from socialism and that there could be no socialism without the accompaniment of thorough-going democratic procedures in the economic, political and social institutions of the country, there were many who took the position prior to the thirties that all that was necessary to do was to transfer industry from private to public ownership and democracy would take care of itself. Experiments in state ownership and control in communist and fascist countries and even in lands with a democratic form of government, both in times of peace and war, proved a rude awakener to these students of the movement and caused large numbers within and without to think through ways and means of safeguarding and strengthening the democratic process under a co-operative system of industry. This examination caused them to lay increasing emphasis on:

- 1) The need for preserving and strengthening democratic forces of the population such as the trade and industrial-union movement, the consumers and producers co-operatives, labourers, socialist and progressive political parties, educational and cultural movement of the masses, and for endeavoring to make these movement thoroughly democratic.
- 2) The need for bringing about a close co-operation among industrial workers, the so-called middle class, the farming population, in the struggle for better social arrangements.
- 3) The need for applying effective democratic techniques to local, state, and federal governments so as to make them thoroughly responsive to the will of the people.
- 4) The need for encouraging, under a co-operative system of industry, an extensive system of voluntary co-operative enterprises, as a supplement to publicly owned industries, especially in agriculture, the distributive trades and in cultural activity.
- 5) The need for establishment within each industry of procedures whereby consumers, workers, and technical and administrative groups would be adequately represented in determination of policies.
- 6) The need of experimenting with the corporate of public ownership of a semi-autonomous character, and of decentralizing control and administration of public ownership as much as seemed compatible and socially efficient.
- 7) The need for developing administrative procedures directed toward efficient, honest, and democratic administration through a sound system of civil service, public accounting, collective bargaining, personal relations etc. Techniques should be devised for stimulating industrial incentives through a proper system of rewards for work well done.
- 8) The need for freedom of consumer choice.
- 9) The necessity of preserving civil liberties and preventing discriminatory practices against any section of population because of race, religion, color, or national origin.
- 10) The need for co-operating with other countries with a view to eliminate the causes of war, of abolishing imperialistic controls, and of raising living standards throughout the world.

23.6.2 Trend towards Democratic Socialism

The goals of democratic socialism have one thing in common; that is to make democracy more real by broadening the application of democratic principles from

political to non-political areas of society. Freedom of worship and freedom of political associations are still the most essential foundations of democracy. The Socialists concentrate on the promotion of these “finer points of democracy”. In contrast, socialist parties have fought an uphill and generally a losing struggle in nations where democracy is not a living thing, but an aspiration, a hope, an idea yet to be realized. This happened for example, in Germany, Italy and France.

23.6.3 Democratic Socialism in England

England developed parliamentary institutions, which were conducive to the growth of socialism. England moved with the times, and brought about a compromise between democracy and socialism. Socialism was allowed to emerge peacefully without the need to have a bloody revolution. Democracy tolerated the rise of social principles.

In Britain, there was no need for workers to revolt on a mass scale against the government, as the government itself took necessary steps to promote their interests. British soil was suitable for the growth of democratic socialism, while on the other hand, in Russia and China the climate was not favourable as the government neglected the interests of the poor and tried to suppress them. As a result, revolutionary socialism rose and its tide swept the government off its feet.

Democratic socialism has no high priest like totalitarian communism. It has no Marx or Lenin. The most influential socialist thinkers in England have frequently been without any official position. Their impact has been due to their moral authority and felicitous literary style.

The movement owes much to the ideas of Robert Owen, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, R.H. Tawney, G.D.H Cole, Harold Laski and many others. But the philosophy still remains undefined. According to Bhaktavatsalam, “the nature and content of democratic socialism cannot by any means be defined. It is a broad framework wherein we have to fit in our ideas of democracy and socialism in tune with our political background and cultural and spiritual heritage.” So there is no definite shape of democratic socialism. It is to be different in different countries according to their needs and conditions. Still we can point out certain broad principles of democratic socialism.

Check Your Progress 4

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
 ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) Enumerate some of the techniques for reconciling democracy with socialism.

.....

2) Trace the evolution of democratic socialism in England.

.....

23.7 BROAD PRINCIPLES

Democratic Socialism lays great stress on the importance of the larger interests of society as a whole, against the narrow and selfish interests of the individual. It is against individualism or laissez-faire, it is a theory of community welfare. It promotes cooperation instead of competition and removes antagonism between the employer and the employee.

Socialism stands for the principle of economic equality. The state should prevent the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few individuals so that the gulf between the rich and the poor classes may not be wide. However, democratic socialism does not aim at establishing absolute equality, which is almost impossible. Its aim is to remove glaring inequality of wealth by progressive taxation of the rich. It stands for equitable opportunities for all.

Democratic socialism also stands for common ownership of important means of production, which are to be utilized for common good. It is in favor of granting full civil, political and economic rights. The individual is free to lead his own way of life, outside intervention. It stands for extension of democracy from political to economic and social fields. Thus, there is a desire to widen the base of democracy. According to it, if democracy is to be real, it should go far beyond the frontiers of politics and enter the economic field.

It is against the ownership of land, factories and other means of production by a few at the cost of the community. It must be clearly noted that democratic socialism is not against all forms of private property, but only against such private property, which becomes the means of exploitation. It allows small plots of land, houses and other limited property, as these cannot be put to anti-social uses. In conclusion, we may say that democratic socialism is neither merely anti-capitalism nor statism. According to J.P Narayan, “there is no exploitation of man by man, no injustice, oppression, or denial of opportunities.”

One of the remarkable results of the victory of democratic socialism in Britain was the elimination of communism as an important factor in British politics. Even in developing countries, democratic socialism provides an alternative to the extremes of communism and capitalism by bringing about the much needed socio-economic transformation of societies.

23.8 NEW LEFTISM: ATTACK ON SOVIET MARXISM

The New Left has a particular characteristic of its own. It believes in socialism and yet strives to promote and protect humanism that had become a scapegoat under the ‘socialist’ system of the former Soviet Union. That is, while the achievements of socialism is the bedrock of traditional Leftism, socialism integrated with democracy and humanism is the keynote of, what is generally known as, New Leftism. What keeps the New left at a fundamental variance with the Old left is its stern emphasis on pursuing positive social and political goals. It believes in freedom and democracy, and is prepared to fight for these ideas.

The New Leftism is a product of the post–Second World period. Its growth is on account of three factors: stern reaction against the version of official Marxism as given by the great comrades of the former Soviet Union, vehement protest against the social, economic and political make up of affluent societies of advanced Western countries, and very strong emphasis on the worth and dignity of man. That is, the movement came as a result of a multi-level protest—protest against Stalinist excesses, against the dogmatic and mechanistic version of Marxism as given by the Soviet

leaders, against centralized and undemocratic ways of doing things and against anti-humanistic, bureaucratic and bourgeoisie society of oppression.

The most recent land mark is the reappearance of the New left, which may be termed 'New Socialism'. The fight of the American Negroes for civil rights, the student revolt in France aimed at changing the education system, the struggle of workers in Spain for democratization of the political system are some of the momentous events that inspired New Leftist thinkers to say that youthful elements can bring about the desired state of affairs. What is needed is change: change towards real democracy, which can be brought about by youthful sections of people. This is because they alone can understand the pernicious dimensions of a socialist system and then fight for restoration of a free, democratic and dignified life.

In brief, the aim of the New Leftists is to attack the variety of Marxism that developed in the former Soviet Union. Instead, they think in terms of a new variety of socialism based on practicable portion of Marxism. Socialism of this type must be in consonance with premises of a democratic system. So that people may have the boons of freedom, development and happiness.

23.9 CHALLENGES/DIFFICULTIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIALISM THROUGH DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES

To say that it is possible to achieve a change over to socialist rule with democratic means does not necessarily imply, however, that it is possible also to implement and maintain socialism with such means. Communist theory has persistently alleged—and on this point it has not yet changed—that it is impossible to carry through socialism under a system of free elections, freedom of speech, free association and free majority decisions.

Soviet theorists do not stand alone in their contention that the implementation and maintenance of socialism are impossible with democratic means. Right-wing liberals, like Friedrich Hayek, agree with them on that count. Their interest is, of course, the opposite: they hope to see democracy maintained and socialism abandoned. But on the major issue under discussion here—whether it is possible to have both democracy and socialism—the two opponents are agreed. It is impossible, they say. In his 'Road of Serfdom' Hayek predicts that socialism will inevitably lead to the abolition of democratic liberties.

One of his chief arguments is that socialism requires centralized planning and that, even in the event that there is a large majority for socialism, there frequently will be no majority able to agree on particulars ends and means. In such a case, he says, a democratic parliament "cannot direct".

In appraising the Lenin-Hayek theory of incompatibility between democracy and socialism, we must not underestimate the strength of their combined arguments. They competently point to grave difficulties and dangers. But they fail to prove the impossibility. Their allegations are half-true at best.

It is a strong argument that those who are to lose their privileges are likely to rise in violent resistance when a radically socialist legislation issues from a pro-socialist majority in a democratic legislature. This was strikingly illustrated after the Spanish Revolution of 1931, when the democratic majority in the newly elected parliament engaged in simultaneously frontal legislative attacks against all vested interests—monarchists, army, church, big land owners and big industrialists—before it had built up sufficiently strong armed forces of its own for support of the republican government. However, there is no justification for a scientific verdict that it was impossible to

Democracy

avoid a similar outcome when an attempt is made to carry through socialism with democratic procedures.

Another strong argument of this problem is that workers who have won parliamentary majorities may be impatient in their desire to secure tangible benefits quickly and beyond reasonable limits. In order to cope with this danger, it will be necessary to educate people in advance so as to prepare them for a meaningful exercise of majority powers. That may not be easy, but it is not necessarily impossible.

Finally, it is a weighty argument when Hayek warns that the majority is likely to split whenever major decisions on planning become necessary. But once this danger has been well understood in advance, it may not be impossible to meet it by proper device, such as a careful preparation of master plans and delegation of the power to make current economic decisions under such plans to some board or commission.

The question of compatibility of democracy and socialism, therefore, is still an open one. There is good reason to believe that it is necessary to go all the way along the totalitarian road, if a majority should be bent on carrying through socialism, although certain modifications in the process of economic legislation and administration will be necessary.

Establishment of a penetrating and reassuring political theory regarding the compatibility of socialism and democracy could also offer encouragement to whatever tendencies there may develop in present Soviet Russia or some of its satellites towards introduction of more democratic institutions. It would make possible a stronger and more precise language in international political discussion about both democracy and socialism, and coexistence as well.

Check Your Progress 5

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What are the broad principles of Socialism?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2) What is New Leftism?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

3) What are the challenges and difficulties in implementing socialism through democratic procedures?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

23.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed at length the differences between Western liberal democracy and socialist democracy, together with the essential ingredients and essence of both the ideologies, i.e. democracy and socialism.

The concept of socialist democracy embodies within itself a system, that builds society based on cooperation instead of competition. Since the last decade, communism as an ideology has been diminishing in strength, in Italy, France, Eastern Europe and Russia. On the other hand, social democratic parties have grown in strength in almost all European countries. Socialist democracy should be defined in terms of basic values such as freedom, equality and fellowship. It supports the demand for public control of resources and enterprises. The essence of socialist democracy lies in four basic tendencies of socialism. They are: *egalitarianism*, meaning the notion of equality, *Moralism* meaning feelings of brotherly love and understanding among human beings, *rationalism* meaning reason and knowledge leading towards democratic functioning and lastly, *libertarianism* which goes with acceptance of equality.

There has been an increasing trend towards democratic socialism in recent times. The concept lays stress on larger interests of society, cooperation, economic equality, common ownership of production utilized for common good and on avoiding extremes of communism. During the first three decades after independence democratic socialism developed into India's most influential political ideology. Democratic socialist orientation of Indian politics was spelled out in concrete terms in the constitution of the republic, in the five year plans since 1952 and generally, in the conduct of Indian government both in domestic and international affairs. However, in the wake of globalization and consequent economic reforms, the situation has undergone a sea change.

The reappearance of the New Left was termed as "New Socialism". This was so, because it aimed to attack the type of Marxism that developed in the erstwhile Soviet Union. The New Left emphasized the premises of a democratic system, meant for freedom and development.

The establishment of a penetrating and reassuring political theory regarding compatibility of socialism and democracy is an encouragement towards the introduction of more democratic institutions. Today, if socialist democracy is to be made more realistic, it can be done by broadening the application of democratic principles from political to non-political areas of society. Socialism of this type must be in consonance with premises of a democratic system.

23.11 KEY WORDS

- Oligarchy** : State governed by a few persons.
- Liberalization** : ideology of extreme liberty and freedom.
- Communism** : order of society in which means of production are to be owned in common.
- Egalitarian** : asserting equality of mankind.
- Leftism** : political views of the Left.
-

23.12 SOME USEFUL REFERENCE

Arthur Rosenberg, *Democracy and Socialism*, London, G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1939

Francis. W Coker, *Recent Political Thought*, New York, 1934

R.N. Berki: *Socialism*, New York

Socialism: *The First 100 Years*; Analyst: The Center for Labour and Social Studies Inc., Italy

23.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXCERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sections 23.1 and 23.2
- 2) See Section 23.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 23.3
- 2) See Section 23.4

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Section 23.5
- 2) See Section 23.6

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See sub-section 23.6.1
- 2) See sub-section 23.6.3

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) See Section 23.7
- 2) See Section 23.8
- 3) See Section 23.9