POLITICAL THEORY: ONLINE NOTES

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For BA(Hons) Political Science 1st Year DESHBANDHU COLLEGE



TOPIC: DEMOCRACY

- Idea and Practice
- Liberal Democracy and its critics
- Multiculturalism and Toleration*Debate* : Representation vs participation

DEMOCRACY: IDEAS AND PRACTICES

- The word democracy comes from two Greek words *demos* and *kratos*. *Demos* means *the common people* and *kratos* means *rule therefore* it literally means rule by the people.
- It is generally believed that democratic government originated in the 'polis' or city states of ancient Greece.
- However, Greek philosophers and historians like Plato, Aristotle and Thucydides have variedly regarded democracy as a poor form of government.
- The idea and practice of democracy was also present in ancient India in different forms, which need to be explored for example the idea of *Samjnana* in *Rig Veda* or *Ganas*, *Samghatagana Sangha Vajji* of *Vriji* and so on.
- The *Lichhhavis* were well-known republics of those times so was the *Sakha* republic. Some of the famous republics of the Buddhist era were: Vaishali, Mithila and so on.

DEMOCRACY: IDEAS & PRACTICES

- Democracy has been defined in various ways by different scholars including government of the people, by the people and for the people. Thus, **Democracy is basically 'Rule by the People' through free and fair elections and other forms of participation.**
- **However,** Elections in themselves do not fulfil the requirement of modern democracies; it must also be *free, fair,* and sufficiently*frequent* if the People's will is to have effect.
- **Liberal democracy** recognizes the moral primacy of the individual and that*all persons have certain fundamental rights such as* **Freedom, Equality, and Dignity of the individual.** A central purpose of democracy is to protect these rights in the practical world of everyday life.
- The People do not give power to government to oppress or abuse, but rather to protect their fundamental rights, interests, and welfare. Therefore they limit government power by authoritative fundamental laws called "constitutions."
- Constitutional government is government that as a practical matter is*limited* both in*what* it does and*how* it acts.
- Thus, any attempt to define it otherwise is a matter of convenience and may have its roots in the difference between what democracy essentially is and how it is practiced.

DEFINITIONS:

- Like other political concepts democracy is also essentially contested concept. Thus, democracy, according to, Greeks is ta system of governance, where people rule over themselves without any external interference.
- Aristotle, considered it as a perverted form of government when he talks about many forms of government. Herodotus, describes democracy as that form of government in which the ruling power of the state is mostly vested in the whole community.
- Abraham Lincoln defined it as a government 'of the people, by the people and for the people.
- Bryce defined democracy as that form of government in which state is legally sovereign.
- According to Mazzini democracy is the best and wisest form of government.



TYPES:

- Direct democracy: When political decisions are made by all members of a polity together without intermediaries, that is called direct democracy. Each individual is having equal moral worth and each person is given a chance to directly influence the policy making process. Historically, small political communities tend to use direct democracy.
- Indirect or Representative democracy: This political arrangement introduces an intermediary political actor between the individual and the state. Through the electoral process, one person or a group of people are elected and assigned with the task of making decisions on behalf of the group of citizens that they represent.
- Procedural democracy: Procedural democracy is understood in a sense of set of procedures like conducting free and fare election or maintaining the rule of law or constitutionalism or fair competition among the political parties and so on.
- Substantive democracy: Substantive democracy is understood in a substantive manner and where merely procedure is not sufficient but the participatory and inclusive character of the people are also very important. Therefore substantive democracy prioritizes the will of the people or how to empower them and so on.



LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

- It is the dominant form of democracy today.
- Liberalism emerged in the context of the transition from feudalism to capitalism and thus advocated individualism.
- Atomistic Individualism advocates independent and autonomous rational self having faculty of reason and therefore responsible to their own destiny.
- Liberals are of different shades and accordingly differ in their understanding of democracy.
- Overall it advocates a representative democracy through franchise and competitive elections based on the principle of political equality (though the concept of political equality has its own historical trajectory) for the protection of individual rights and liberty and prevention of abuse of power and authority.



MODELS OR THEORIES OF DEMOCRACY

- Liberal
- Pluralist
- Socialist
- Marxist
- Multiculturalist
- Feminist

AND SO ON...

LET'S THINK...

- What is democracy? Is there a difference between democratic ideals and its practices?
- How would you assess the process of election in strengthening the democracy?
- How is democracy linked with constitutionalism and liberalism?
- Why are freedom of belief, conscience, and expression essential to democracy?
- What is the difference between democracy and a dictatorship of the majority?
- Can you think of ways that democracy can protect the rights of minorities?
- How does limited government help to fulfil the purposes of democracy?
- What responsibilities does democracy place upon citizens?
- What are different theories of democracy?
- What is multicultural democracy? Can you consider India as a multicultural democracy?
- In the era of globalization what are the challenges of democracy?



LINKS FOR ARTICLES

- The Idea of Democracy, Author(s): J. T. Delos, Source: The Review of Politics, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Jan., 1943), pp. 38-54, Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1404623.
- Varieties of Capitalism and Types of Democracy, Author(s): PHILIPPE C. SCHMITTER and ARPAD TODOR Source: Stato e mercato, No. 100 (1) (aprile 2014), pp. 87-115.Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/24650929.
- Classical and Empirical Theories of Democracy: The Missing Historical Dimension? Author(s): Iain Hampsher-Monk Source: British Journal of Political Science, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Apr., 1980), pp. 241-251 URL:https://www.jstor.org/stable/193481.
- Rights and recognition: Perspectives on multicultural democracy Author(s): MORAG PATRICKSource: Ethnicities, Vol. 2, No. 1 (March 2002), pp. 31-51. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/23889940.
- India: Multicultural Democracy at the Millennium, Author(s): Mira Kamdar Source: World Policy Journal, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Fall, 1996), pp. 71-79. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/40209491.