Lesson-4

Understanding Democracy

INTRODUCTION

Every country, whether big or small, needs a government to take care of its administration. It is interesting to note that the history a plays an important role in the kind of government it has today. Many different Monarchs ruled over India for a long time till the British came and established their rule over the country. After gaining independence from the British, leaders in India chose democracy as the best way to empower the people and develop the country. While there are many other countries that have adopted other forms of government. Monarchy, dictatorship and democracy are some forms of government.

Monarchy

In ancient times most of the countries were divided into many kingdoms. Kings and queens used to rule over them. They were called **monarchs**.A monarch enjoyed the supreme power to make a decision on any matter regarding the country, without consulting anyone. Kingship was hereditary, and the people could not elect or remove a king. In some parts of the world, monarchy exist even now. A monarch does not necessarily guarantee any rights to the people and they cannot express their opinions freely. For example, in ancient India, kingship passed down from Chandragupta Maurya to Bindisar and then to Ashoka. After Iltutmish, the reign of Delhi Sultanate passed on to his daughter, Razia Sultan, one of the few woman monarch of her time.

Dictatorship

Dictatorship is a form of government where a country is governed by a person, or political entity, that has full power and is not restricted by a constitution or laws. Usually, dictatorship governments are formed when power is taken by force from the rulers or the government. The rights and freedoms of the people are often limited , and the dictator assumes absolute power over all. Protest are rare under such governments and opinions and voices often go unheard or punished.

<u>Democracy</u>

Democracy comes from two Greek words – demos meaning 'people' and kratia meaning 'rule'. In a democracy, people have the power, and it effectively means the rule of the people. Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as a 'government by the people, of the people and for the people.' Democracy originated around the fifth century in Athens, which was a city state of Greece. It followed direct democracy In which people voted at any one place and decided by a simple majority.

Elements of Democracy

Participation of people - a democratic government is formed after people participate in elections. Democracy works successfully only when people take interest in the working and functioning of the government.

In olden times, when the population was less, people could gather at a place in a city, or under a tree in a village, and matters would be decided by a simple majority vote. This simple form of democracy was known as **direct democracy.** Gradually, as the population increased, cities and villages became larger, elections were held. Thus, the system of electing representatives, who would govern on behalf of the people, came into being. This is known as **representative democracy.**

Voting

in a democracy, the citizens of a country elect the government by **voting**, and they also have the power to remove someone by not voting for them in the next election. **Franchise** refers to the rights of citizenship. Totally all democratic governments of the world provide **Universal Adult Franchise** where all adult citizens enjoy the right to vote. The elections in which the union government is formed is called the General Elections. This makes a democratic government responsible and accountable to the people. The elected representative know that they have to participate in an election after a fixed period of time, and if they do not fulfill their promises, the people will not vote for them the next time. Democracy is based on the principle of equality of all citizens without any discrimination. A democratic country does not discriminate against its citizens on the basis of caste, creed, color, gender, language, or any such factors.

Other forms of Participation

Sometimes, when laws and legislations are not received well by the people, they protest against them. People may protest by shouting slogans, organizing strikes or by conducting signature campaigns. In a democratic, people can express their views in many forms. They may organize strikes, dharnas, rallies etc. people also organize social movements to protest or challenge policies of the government. Members of the minority community, dalits, adivasis, women and others use this as a means to participate in the democratic process.

Resolution of Conflicts

The government is responsible for solving conflicts. The duties of the government includes bringing situations of conflicts under control and maintaining law and order in the society. In India, there are different groups of people practicing different religions and sometimes it leads to clashes. In many instances, it has acted as a cause of tension and conflict in the society. There have been many instances where groups from different religions clash with each other. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that such clashes do not occur, and all the people live in harmony with each other. Sharing of river water is always a cause of conflict between states. These conflicts are also resolved by the government by forming a tribunal and through negotiations.

Equality and Justice

Democracy is based on the principle of equality of all and citizens without discrimination. A democratic country does not discriminate against its citizens on the basis of caste, creed, color, gender, language, or any such factors. Equality can be ensured in the society only when all religions are given equal status and are considered at par with each other. Justice for all can also be ensured if people who wish to violate these doctrines are not allowed to do so. A democratic government always guarantees equality and justice to the people. Equality and Justice are upheld by the constitution as the ideals India should strive to achieve.

Role of Media

Media plays an important role in a democracy. It acts as the voice of people and provides information about work done by the government. Newspapers, magazines and TV play an important role in discussing government issues and responsibilities. **Social Media** helps to gather support for protest and convey messages across the population.

Television is a popular medium which carries out debates and programs through which the voice of the people reaches the government.

Democracy in India

India became a democracy in 1950, after a long drawn struggle against the colonial rule of the British. Indian democracy allows all citizens of India to vote. The Indian Constitution guarantees Universal Adult Franchise. All citizens of India who are 18 years and above enjoy the right to vote. As the population size has grown in a large number, India practices representative democracy. People elect their representatives who decide matters on behalf of people. In our country, the government stays in power for five years after which elections are held again.