

CHAPTER - 2

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY WHY DEMOCRACY

Question 1:

Here is some information about four countries. Based on this information, how would you classify each of these countries. Write 'democratic', 'undemocratic' or 'not sure' against each of these.

(a) Country A: People who do not accept the country's official religion do not have a right to vote

Answer: Undemocratic

(b) Country B: The same party has been winning elections for the last twenty years

Answer: Not sure

(c) Country C: Ruling party has lost in the last three elections

Answer: Democratic

(d) Country D: There is no independent election commission

Answer: Undemocratic

Question 2:

Here is some information about four countries. Based on this information, how would you classify each of these countries. Write 'democratic', 'undemocratic' or 'not sure' against each of these.

(a) Country P: The parliament cannot pass a law about the army without the consent of the Chief of Army

Answer: Undemocratic

(b) Country Q: The parliament cannot pass a law reducing the powers of the judiciary

Answer: Undemocratic

(c) Country R: The country's leaders cannot sign any treaty with another country without taking permission from its neighbouring country.

Answer: Not sure

(d) Country S: All the major economic decisions about the country are taken by officials of the central bank which the ministers cannot change.

Answer: Not sure

Question 3:

Which of these is not a good argument in favour of democracy? Why?

- (a) People feel free and equal in a democracy
- (b) Democracies resolve conflict in a better way than others
- (c) Democratic government is more accountable to the people
- (d) Democracies are more prosperous than others

Answer 3: Economic prosperity depends on many factors; like availability of natural resources, quality of human resources, finance, geopolitical scenario, etc. A particular form of government is some role to play, so it cannot be seen as a good argument in favour of democracy.

Question 4:

Each of these statements contains a democratic and an undemocratic element. Write out the two separately for each statement.

(a) A minister said that some laws have to be passed by the parliament in order to conform to the regulations decided by the World Trade Organisation.

Answer: The fact that the laws need to be passed by the parliament is democratic, while conformation to the WTO regulations is undemocratic.

(b) The Election Commission ordered re-polling in a constituency where large scale rigging was reported.

Answer: Re-polling is democratic, while rigging is undemocratic.

(c) Women's representation in the parliament has never reached 10 per cent. This led women's organisations to demand one-third seats for women.

Answer: Poor level of women's representation is undemocratic, while the demand for one-third seats is democratic.

Question 5:

Which of these is not a valid reason for arguing that there is a lesser possibility of famine in a democratic country?

- (a) Opposition parties can draw attention to hunger and starvation.
- (b) Free press can report suffering from famine in different parts of the country.
- (c) Government fears its defeat in the next elections.
- (d) People are free to believe in and practise any religion.

Answer 5: (d) People are free to believe in and practise any religion.

Question 6:

There are 40 villages in a district where the government has made no provision for drinking water. These villagers met and considered many methods of forcing the government to respond to their need. Which of these is not a democratic method?

- (a) Filing a case in the courts claiming that water is part of right to life.
- (b) Boycotting the next elections to give a message to all parties.
- (c) Organising public meetings against government's policies.
- (d) Paying money to government officials to get water.

Answer 6: (d) Paying money to government officials to get water.

Question 7:

Write a response to the following arguments against democracy:

(a) Army is the most disciplined and corruption-free organisation in the country. Therefore army should rule the country.

Answer: Army officers are not elected by people and hence an army rule would be undemocratic.

(b) Rule of the majority means the rule of ignorant people. What we need is the rule of the wise, even if they are in small numbers.

Answer: Democracy is based on the idea of universal adult franchise. Restricting the rulers from a small section comprising of 'wise' people would defeat the purpose of representational democracy.

(c) If we want religious leaders to guide us in spiritual matters, why not invite them to guide us in politics as well. The country should be ruled by religious leaders.

Answer: Religious leaders are not elected by people and hence a country should not be ruled by religious leaders.

Question 8:

Are the following statements in keeping with democracy as a value? Why?

(a) Father to daughter: I don't want to hear your opinion about your marriage. In our family children marry where the parents tell them to.

Answer: In this case, the daughter does not have the freedom of choice, hence this is undemocratic.

(b) Teacher to student: Don't disturb my concentration by asking me questions in the classroom.

Answer: The teacher may be involved in thinking about an important topic and hence is asking the student not to disturb her. It cannot be said with surety whether the teacher's request is democratic or not.

(c) Employee to the officer: Our working hours must be reduced according to the law.

Answer: The employee is asking for a fundamental right and hence it is democratic.

Question 9:

Consider the following facts about a country and decide if you would call it a democracy. Give reasons to support your decision.

(a) All the citizens of the country have right to vote. Elections are held regularly.

Answer: Regular elections and universal adult franchise are two important features of a democracy and hence this is a democratic situation.

(b) The country took loan from international agencies. One of the conditions for giving loan was that the government would reduce its expenses on education and health.

Answer: An international agency should not interfere in the internal matters of a country. Hence this is undemocratic.

(c) People speak more than seven languages but education is available only in one language, the language spoken by 52 percent people of that country.

Answer: This is an example where majority view is being imposed and hence is undemocratic.

(d) Several organisations have given a call for peaceful demonstrations and nationwide strikes in the country to oppose these policies. Government has arrested these leaders.

Answer: Democratic government should provide the right to protest. The government is denying such right to its citizens and hence is undemocratic.

(e) The government owns the radio and television in the country. All the newspapers have to get permission from the government to publish any news about government's policies and protests.

Answer: Freedom of media is very important for a democracy. This is an undemocratic example.