

UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL THEORY

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COURSE INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL THEORY

August Comte had opined that theories are the conceptual lenses through which we can sort out the plethora of facts that we confront daily. In fact, without theories we might not be able to identify something as a fact at all. There are some features of a good theory. The first virtue is parsimony which implies frugality. A theory should be parsimonious to forgo unnecessary speculation and confusing details. Second feature of a sound theory is accuracy. Theories must be sufficiently detailed to allow for accurate assessments and explanations of the world. An elegant theory simply yet precisely interprets, describes, explains or predicts some aspect of the world. However, these virtues are mostly identified as features of scientific theories. The explanatory and predictive behaviour of natural sciences is not found in social sciences as too many uncontrolled and unforeseen forces affect political and social life and that is why, social and political practices are seldom replicable. In the light of these problems, some experts have argued that social scientists should not try to mimic the natural sciences; instead, they should develop their own standards and procedures. For theorists of social and political life, therefore, the ability to feel and think in ways similar to the object of study is a crucial component of their task.

In the West, political theory emerged out of political philosophy on one hand, and political thought, on the other. But, it should be remembered that political theory is different from both. It differs from political philosophy in the sense that it is less formal and atomistic and less concerned to establish logical relationships between individual political concepts. Political theory is different from political thought by being less historical in focus. Thus, political theory is an essentially mixed mode of thought. It not only embraces deductive argument and empirical theory, but combines them with normative concern, so acquiring a practical, action-guiding character. It is an attempt to arrive at a comprehensive, coherent and general account of the sorts of things that we talk about when we discuss about politics. A good political theorist is able to move between social conditions and political concepts. Political theory must involve a good deal of knowledge of political practice. Another aspect of political theory is that it is always defined by the specific situations and problems political thinkers have witnessed. To understand political theory, we need to understand both the history of ideas on which the thinkers draw and the problems they considered themselves to be facing and to which their work was addressed. Studying the context in which political theory originally arose allows us to critically assess whose particular interests it reflected.

In the light of above discussion, this course on **Understanding Political Theory** is divided in three blocks.

Block 1 is **Introducing Political Theory** and has two units namely **What is Political Theory: Two Approaches – Normative and Empirical** and **What is Politics: Study of State and Power**. This section introduces the students to the idea of political theory, its historical evolution and main approaches to study it. This section also provides an insight into concepts of politics, state and power.

Block 2 is **Approaches to Political Theory** and has five units namely, **Liberal, Marxist, Conservative, Feminist** and **Post-modern**. Apart from discussing these theories in detail, this section also critically analyses them so as to develop critical thinking.

Block 3 is **The Grammar of Democracy** having five units namely, **The Idea of Democracy, Democracy, Representation and Accountability, Representative Democracy and its Limits, Participation and Dissent** and **Democracy and Citizenship**. This section deals with the concept of democracy in detail including various types of democracies, main theories and relationship between democracy and issues like dissent and citizenship. Each unit has inbuilt Check Your Progress Exercises which would help students in examining their conceptual understanding of the subject. At the end of the course, Suggested Readings cover a list of useful books for further analysis.



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Block 3
The Grammar of Democracy

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BLOCK 3 THE GRAMMER OF DEMOCRACY

Block 3 is the last block having five units that deal with various themes from the concept of democracy. **Unit 8** gives the general understanding of the idea of democracy and its various types like classical, elitist, popular and e-democracy. **Unit 9** highlights concepts of democracy, representation and accountability with specific focus on the later two themes. **Unit 10** deals with the concept of representative democracy, various views on it and principles of representative democracy. **Unit 11** discusses two critical components of democracy, participation and dissent, their types and the relationship between them. **Unit 12** is the last unit of this course which highlights the two inter-related concepts, democracy and citizenship through themes like rights and responsibilities, active and passive participation and the issues of identity.



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UNIT 8 THE IDEA OF DEMOCRACY*

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction: Meaning of Democracy
- 8.2 Procedural/Minimalist and Substantive/Maximalist Dimension
- 8.3 Types of Democracy
- 8.4 Theories of Democracy
 - 8.4.1 Classical Democracy
 - 8.4.2 Elitist Theory
 - 8.4.3 Pluralist Theory
 - 8.4.4 Participatory Democracy
 - 8.4.5 Deliberative Democracy
 - 8.4.6 People's Democracy
 - 8.4.7 Social Democracy
 - 8.4.8 Cosmopolitan Democracy
 - 8.4.9 E-democracy
- 8.5 Foreign Policy Dimension: Democracy Promotion
- 8.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.7 References
- 8.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

8.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will explore the idea of democracy at national and international levels. After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the meaning of democracy;
- Distinguish between its minimalist and maximalist forms;
- Understand its various types; and
- Explain democracy promotion at the international level.

8.1 INTRODUCTION: MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

The concept of democracy is more than 2500 years old having first appeared in Athens in the 5th century BC. Likewise, the word democracy is of Greek origin derived from the word '*demokratia*'. It is a combination of two Greek words, '*demos*' meaning people and '*kratos*' meaning power. Hence, democracy stands for rule by the people which gives true legitimacy to the government. It is one of the most debated issues in the field of Political Science as it is a 'contested concept'. This means although there is a general agreement on the meaning of democracy, yet there are differences on how to implement it. That is why; there are different types of democracy, direct, representative, deliberative etc. There

* Dr. Raj Kumar Sharma, Academic Associate, Faculty of Political Science, IGNOU, New Delhi

is a consensus on the idea that democracy means popular rule and sovereignty, but how that will be achieved varies. There are, however, some inherent contradictions in the way democracy is practiced. How to achieve people's participation, balance between liberty and equality, protection of minority rights and to avoid tyranny of majority etc are some of the questions which democracies have to grapple with. One of the central problems faced by democracies all over the world is how to balance between liberty and equality. The English liberal tradition gives more importance to liberty while the French tradition treats equality as superior to liberty. Negative liberty places more emphasis on the individual and his rights while positive liberty talks of limiting these rights to attain equality. This means that negative liberty favors a limited role for the state, while positive liberty wants state intervention to create conditions where equality could exist. The state is asked by positive liberals to rectify social and economic imbalances through legislation.

That notwithstanding, there are a number of advantages that a democracy has over other forms of governments. It prevents rule of the oppressors, fosters human development, facilitates protection of individual rights and freedoms and could even prevent wars at the international level as democracies normally do not fight against each other. In his 1861 book, *Considerations on Representative Government*, J S Mill has given three advantages of democratic decision making over non-democratic ones. First, strategically, democracy compels decision makers to take into account interests, opinions and rights of most of the people which would not be the case in an authoritarian or aristocratic form of government. Second, epistemologically, democracy brings in a number of varied views in the process which allows decision makers to pick up the best ideas. Third, democracy also helps in character building of citizens as it inculcates qualities like rationality, autonomy and independent thinking. This creates pressure of public opinion on political leaders who cannot ignore people's views in order to remain in power. In this context, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has touched upon the relationship between democracy and famines, arguing that there have been no famines in a functioning democracy as the leaders are accountable to the people and cannot ignore their basic welfare.

Former Prime Minister of United Kingdom, Winston Churchill had reservations about democracy but he still said that it was the worst form of government *except* all those other forms that have been tried from time to time. Understood in a broader sense, democracy is not only a form of government and state, but it is also a condition of society or a way of life. A democratic society is one in which there is socio-economic equality while a democratic state is one where citizens get a chance to participate in open and fair political process. Radical democrats in the 1960s and the 1970s believed that socio-economic equality was a precondition for success of political democracy. Some frequent meanings attributed to the term democracy are as follows:

- Rule by the poor and disadvantaged
- Society based on equal opportunity and individual merit instead of hierarchy and privilege
- Welfare and redistribution to reduce social inequality
- Decision making based on majority rule

- Protection of minority rights by placing checks on majority rule
- Fulfilling public offices through competition for popular vote.

In a broader sense, a number of features can be attributed to a democracy. A written constitution, rule of law, human rights, independent media and judiciary, separation of powers between the executive, the judiciary and the legislature could be described as some of the basic features of democracy. The idea of democracy has come a long way from its initial form in Greece which was not inclusive in nature. The Greek model of democracy excluded women, slaves and immigrants making it ‘undemocratic’ in spirit. This spirit continued even in modern democracies like France, Britain and the US where some sections were not allowed to vote while the voting rights were given to wealthy men. The French Revolution of 1789 talked about liberty, equality and fraternity apart from popular sovereignty for mankind. However, women did not get the right to vote and it was only in 1944 that France started universal adult suffrage. In Britain, women got the right to vote in 1928 while in the US, they got this right in 1920. However, discrimination on the basis of color remained in the US and it was only in 1965 that the African American women and males were given the right to vote. India has been progressive in this regard compared to Western democracies as it adopted universal adult franchise from 1950 when its constitution came into force and became the world’s first democratic state to have universal adult franchise since inception. Saudi Arabia has recently allowed women to vote and in 2015, women for the first time exercised their right to vote in municipal elections.

The geographical expanse of democracies world over has been well demonstrated by Samuel P Huntington, in his 1991 book *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Expressing his views on three waves of democratization, he stated that democratization can be described as the process leading to establishment of democracy. The first wave lasted between 1828 and 1926 with 33 countries having democratic governments due to the impact of French and American Revolutions. This wave was accompanied by a reverse wave between 1922 and 1942 when there were only 11 democracies in the world due to the Great Depression and rise of Communism, Fascism and Nazism. The second wave lasted between 1943 and 1962 which saw a maximum of 52 democracies all over the world following decolonization. The second reverse wave lasted between 1958 and 1975 due to disillusionment with modernization, problems in development and military coups in Latin America. The number of democracies came down to 30 countries in this period. The third wave of democratization started in 1974 with 65 democratic countries as of 1989 due to decolonization and the end of the Cold War. Huntington also mentioned that the third reverse wave had started in 1980s as Haiti, Nigeria, Suriname and Sudan fell to undemocratic forces. Political scientists have termed the fall of authoritarian governments during the ‘Arab Spring’ in 2011 in West Asia as the fourth wave of democratization.

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? What are the advantages of democracy over other forms of government?

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8.2 PROCEDURAL/MINIMALIST AND SUBSTANTIVE/MAXIMALIST DIMENSION

Democracy could be well understood by two different views – procedural (minimalist) and substantive (maximalist). The procedural dimension merely focuses on procedures or means in place to attain democracy. It argues that regular competitive elections on the basis of universal adult franchise and plural political participation would produce a democratically elected government. In his 1942 book, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, Joseph Schumpeter has said that democracy is “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote”. Huntington has also echoed similar views saying, “The central procedure of democracy is the selection of leaders through competitive elections by the people they govern.” However, people are perceived as passive beyond electoral participation in minimalist view and thus are governed by their representatives. This view does not focus on liberty and freedom as it emphasizes how to elect a democratic government. In the absence of checks and balances in the system, the elected leaders could manipulate procedures and power for their own benefit leading to concealed authoritarianism. The government could work for the elites who hold power instead of the people who should hold ultimate authority in a democratic set up. Such instances have existed in Argentina and Brazil between 1980s and 1990s. The governments in Central Asian countries too could be described as procedural democracies as the power has been concentrated in hands of a single individual although periodic elections are held from time to time. Terry Karl has pointed that minimalist view could also lead to a ‘fallacy of electoralism’, a situation where electoral process is given priority over other dimensions of democracy. Fareed Zakaria calls it ‘illiberal democracy’, a case where governments are democratically elected but ignore constitutional limits on their power and deprive their citizens of basic rights and freedoms.

Substantive democracy tries to overcome the shortcomings of procedural view arguing that social and economic differences could hamper people’s participation in the democratic process. It focuses on outcomes like social equality instead of ends in order to truly work for the governed. In a sense, it talks about ‘common good’ rather than benefit of limited individuals. The rights of marginalized sections like women and the poor are protected through redistributive justice so that conditions can be created through state intervention for their participation in political process. Various political scientists like John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill have contributed to the emergence of this view. Unlike Schumpeter who believed that conception of democracy

which aim for ambitious forms of equality are dangerous, Rousseau argued that a formal variety of democracy is equivalent to slavery and its only egalitarian democracies which have political legitimacy.

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) Distinguish between procedural and substantive democracy.

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8.3 TYPES OF DEMOCRACY

Broadly speaking, democracy can be classified as direct and representative depending on how the people rule. Direct democracy is based on direct and unmediated citizen participation in government rule. All adult citizens take part in decision making to ensure that all the viewpoints are discussed and best possible decisions are taken. Direct democracy wipes out the distinction between the government and the governed and the state and civil society. The ancient Greek city state model was an example of direct democracy. In contemporary times, direct democracy can be found in Swiss cantons. In the Greek model, there was physical presence of citizens in the assembly to ensure their participation. However, the Swiss model is slightly different as it depends on methods like initiative, recall and plebiscite to ensure popular participation in policy making. Initiative gives people power to propose a legislation which should be discussed by the legislature. Recall is the power in hands of people through which they can remove their policy makers if their performance is not up to the mark. In a plebiscite, an important question is put in front of citizens for their approval or disapproval. Direct democracy ensures greater legitimacy as people are more likely to follow decisions which are taken by them only. It also creates a highly informed citizenry which participates in decision making. However, there is vast difference in size (geography, population) between a city-state and a nation-state. That is why practicing direct democracy is difficult in big modern nation states. This issue was solved with the development of representative democracy, which first appeared in northern Europe in the 18th century. Representative democracy is limited and an indirect form of democracy. It is limited because popular participation in policy making is very less pertaining to voting in a few years while it is indirect as people do not exercise power directly but through their elected representatives. Presidential and parliamentary democracies are two main types of representative democracies around the world. There are more parliamentary democracies around the world than presidential democracies. Parliamentary democracies are more representative than presidential, but at the same time, they are relatively less stable.

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 do you understand by representative democracy?

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8.4 THEORIES OF DEMOCRACY

8.4.1 Classical Democracy

Classical democracy is based on the polis or the city state of Ancient Greece with a particular system of rule that developed in the largest and the most powerful Greek city-state based on mass meetings. The remarkable feature of this model was that citizens were politically very active. Apart from participating in Assembly meetings, citizens also contributed to decision-making and public offices. However, it excluded women, slaves and foreigners from citizenship. It is pertinent to mention that it was only because of slaves and women that male Athenian citizens could get free time to devote to political affairs. Hence, their exclusion from citizenship was unfortunate and undemocratic. *Plato* in his book, *The Republic* criticized Athenian democracy saying that people were incapable to rule themselves wisely and they required rule by philosopher kings and guardians who are suited to rule.

8.4.2 Elitist Theory

This theory was propounded by *Vilfredo Pareto*, *G Mosca*, *Robert Michels* and *Joseph Schumpeter*. The theory was developed in the discipline of sociology but has major implications for political science as well. Michels gave his ‘iron law of oligarchy’, arguing that despite its original aim, every organization is ultimately reduced to oligarchy amounting to the rule of few. Mosca said that people can be categorized as rulers and the ruled. Most of the power, prestige and wealth are in the hands of the ruling class irrespective of the form of government. The ruled follow the elite as they do not have leadership qualities. This theory poses serious questions to democracy and suggests that in practice, democracy is not achievable as the elites would control the power, wealth and hence, decision making.

8.4.3 Pluralist Theory

Contrary to the elitist theory, pluralists believe that policy making is a decentralized process where different groups bargain for their views to be accepted. It is result of interaction between different groups unlike few elites.

Public policy is formulated by more organized and vocal groups. The main proponents of this theory include *Karl Mannheim*, *Raymond Aron*, *Robert Dahl* and *Charles Lindblom*. Dahl and Lindblom gave the concept of ‘polyarchy’ meaning rule by many instead of rule by all citizens. They concluded that although the politically privileged and economically powerful exert more influence than ordinary citizens, no elite is permanently able to dominate the political process.

8.4.4 Participatory Democracy

All democracies are participatory in the sense that they are based on popular consent which ensures their participatory nature. However, there are chances that the role of citizens could be limited to just voting in a democracy. The gap between elected representatives and the people widens in complex democracies which have variety of people divided by caste, class, religion, region etc. In contrast to elitist and pluralist theories, participatory democracy advocates active citizen participation in policy making to ensure common good is promoted while it also makes the government more accountable towards the citizens. *Jean J. Rousseau*, *J S Mill* and *C B Macpherson* supported the idea of participatory democracy. Rousseau argued for popular sovereignty as the supreme power is vested in hands of the people which is their inalienable right and the citizens should involve themselves in state affairs. Mill said that a government which promotes moral, intellectual and active qualities in its citizens is the best government.

8.4.5 Deliberative Democracy

Deliberative democracy argues that political decisions should be based on fair and reasonable deliberations among citizens. This is required to produce best decisions to achieve public good. It emphasizes on the quality of process for best outcomes. *John Rawls* and *Jurgen Habermas* have argued for a deliberative democracy. Rawls believed that reason can overcome self interest to attain a just political society. Habermas believed that fair procedures and clear communication would lead to legitimate and mutually agreed upon decisions.

8.4.6 People’s Democracy

People’s democracy refers to democratic models generated by the *Marxist* tradition. Marxists have been interested in social equality and hence, have their own idea of democracy against the Western model which they say only generates political equality. People’s democracy is established after the proletarian revolution when the proletariat starts making political decisions. This will eventually give way to Communism marked by self-regulation. While Karl Marx talked about the rule of the proletariat, Lenin changed the concept and introduced the role of the party as the vanguard of the proletariat. However, Lenin did not establish mechanisms to check the power of the party and its powerful leaders to ensure that they remained accountable to the proletariat.

8.4.7 Social Democracy

Social democracy stands for a basic change in Marxist thought, although it shares same goals with Communism. It aims to establish a socialist society, but not through revolution but through state regulation of means of production. Social

democrats do not believe in the Marxist critique of democracy, which seen as a “bourgeois” facade for class rule. Instead, social democrats see democracy as essential for achieving socialist ideals. That is why they stand for state regulation of business and industry in order to ensure welfare of citizens. This movement started with the efforts of *August Bebel* and *Wilhelm Liebknecht* who cofounded the Social Democratic Workers’ Party in 1869 in Germany.

8.4.8 Cosmopolitan Democracy

Cosmopolitan democracy is a response to economic and cultural globalization arguing that democracy should respond to challenges beyond borders since states are interdependent on each other. *Immanuel Kant* and *David Held* the one of the main proponents of cosmopolitan democracy. They argue that democracy should extend to global sphere and there should be democratization of international organizations like the UN which are dominated by the West. Voices of marginalized countries should be heard as well and less developed and rising powers should have representations in global governance. The idea of cosmopolitan citizenship goes beyond traditional citizenship of a state arguing for global citizenship and that is why, there is a rise of movements which are global in nature due to similarity of interests among states. Women’s movement and environmental movements are the prime examples as their repercussions are being felt all over the world.

8.4.9 E-Democracy

This is a relatively new concept but is based on the works done by earlier theorists. E-democracy or electronic democracy is the use of information and technology to enhance or even replace representative democracy. Common problems in all democracies – issues of scale, lack of time, decline of community values, and lack of opportunities for policy deliberation could be dealt with digital communication. Supporters of e-democracy have built on the ideas of participatory democracy to enhance active citizen participation in policy making.

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) What are the drawbacks of people’s democracy?

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2) What do you understand by cosmopolitan citizenship?

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8.5 FOREIGN POLICY DIMENSION: DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

Various countries and international organizations assist other countries in promotion of democracy and human rights since it is believed that democracies are less likely to fight wars among themselves and economic and social indicators are better in a democracy compared to other forms of government. This is in sync with the democratic peace theory propounded by *Immanuel Kant* and *Thomas Paine* who believed constitutional republics are less likely to wage wars against each other. Democracy has been vigorously promoted as a foreign policy tool by the US and many European countries, apart from the European Union. Former US President, Woodrow Wilson had once said that the world must be made safe for democracy and made efforts to promote democracy through bilateral relations and multilateral forums like Pan-American Liberty Pact. The ideological fight between Communism and Democracy was witnessed during the Cold War, when the US and its allies tried to check the spread of Communism and promote democratic values. The Ronald Reagan administration inserted the democracy agenda in American foreign policy saying democracy was necessary for promoting human rights. The National Endowment for Democracy was established in the 1980s while the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was used as a tool for democracy promotion by the US post-Soviet countries and Latin America. The trend continued in the 1990s and democracy promotion was one of the three pillars of President Bill Clinton's foreign policy. President George W Bush continued this trend; however, he used military means to achieve his objective of democracy promotion, for instance in Iraq and Afghanistan. European countries also started to assist democracy promotion in the 1970s. The European Union started European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights in the 1990s. Some other countries like Japan, India, Argentina and Brazil also promote democracy, but the degree of promotion varies vastly. International and regional organizations like the UN and African Union also promote democracy and human rights. The UN charter talks about protection of human rights while in 2006, the UN established the UN Democracy Fund to assist civil society organizations to strengthen democracy.

After the end of the Cold War, *Francis Fukuyama* in his 1992 book *The End of History and the Last Man* argued that democracy has proved a better system than the other forms of government and liberal democracy is the final form of government for all nations. However, this is easier said than done and a number of problems can be witnessed in the democracy promotion process. A number of external interventions have been justified on the grounds of democracy and

human rights promotion. The failure of democracy promotion in Iraq and Afghanistan has raised doubts whether such external interventions is justified or not. External intervention may ensure procedural democracy, but achieving substantive democracy remains difficult due to lack of real reform. That is why; external interventions mainly lead to what has been called ‘imposed democracy’ as the internal reform and modernization remains elusive in the target country. It also goes against the very spirit of democracy i.e. the right to self-determination, as it is not the citizens of the country but outsiders who decide the type of government in the target country. In the post 9/11 world, there is too much emphasis on counter-terrorism efforts which acts as an impediment to human rights of minorities and the concept of multiculturalism. There are other models of development like China which appeal to different countries wanting to contain democracy. China, despite being largest authoritarian state in the world, is set to become world’s largest economy in coming years. These shortcomings raise questions over the practice of democracy promotion in international affairs. The international community itself needs democratization as the international bodies are dominated by P-5 countries (the US, Russia, Britain, France and China) while the emerging powers like India, Japan, Germany, Brazil and South Africa do not have adequate representation in international governance.

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 challenges before democracy promotion in international affairs?

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8.6 LET US SUM UP

Democracy has evolved as a concept over the years and has become more inclusive. It is one of the most debated themes in political science as people agree on its meaning, but do not agree on how to achieve democracy. That is why; there are several types of democracies from direct to representative ones. With changing times, there are new dimensions of democracy, like e-democracy which are coming up. The idea of democracy is challenged by the issues of immigration, terrorism and anarchic nature of international system, however, as Robert Dahl in his 1989 book, *Democracy and its Critics* has argued, democracy is superior to other systems in at least three ways. It promotes freedom, human development and it is the surest way for people to safeguard and promote goods and interests they share with others.

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8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should include the following:
 - Greek origins of the word.
 - Difference between direct and indirect democracy.
 - Rule by the people.
 - J S Mill's views on advantages of democracy.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Your answer should highlight the difference between the mechanism and actual practice of democracy.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Your answer should highlight the rule by elected representatives.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Your answer should elaborate the influence of the Marxist tradition on democracy.
- 2) Your answer should highlight the influence of globalization on democracy.

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) Your answer should include the following:
 - Democratic peace theory.
 - Promotion of democracy as a foreign policy tool.
 - Mention of Francis Fukuyama's book.



UNIT 9 DEMOCRACY, REPRESENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY*

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Representation in Democracy
- 9.3 Types of Representation
 - 9.3.1 Territorial Representation
 - 9.3.2 Functional Representation
- 9.4 Theories of Representation
 - 9.4.1 Reactionary Theory
 - 9.4.2 Conservative Theory
 - 9.4.3 Liberal Theory
 - 9.4.4 Radical Theory
- 9.5 Election System in Representative Democracy
 - 9.5.1 Plurality System
 - 9.5.2 Majoritarian System
 - 9.5.3 Proportional System
- 9.6 Accountability: Fundamental to Democracy
- 9.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.8 References
- 9.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

9.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will be reading about democracy, representation and accountability and also the relationship between these three concepts. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the meaning of democracy;
- Discuss the concepts on representation and accountability; and
- Examine the relationship between these three concepts.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The term democracy has been in use in the tradition of western political thought since ancient times. Democracy is a Greek word which means a state in which leaders are chosen from among the general population. It could thus be distinguished from ‘aristocracy’ which means the rule of the wise; from ‘oligarchy’ which means rule by strong groups like certain family and from ‘monarchy’ which means rule by an individual. Democracy signifies the rule of the people. Several exponents of democracy have treated democracy chiefly as

* Dr. Rachna Suchinmayee, Magadh University, Patna

a form of government like Austin, James Bryce, A.V. Dicey, A.L. Lowell and John Seeley. Democracy is not primarily a form of government, but a democratic government implies a democratic state. All that a democratic state means is that the community as a whole possesses sovereign authority and maintains ultimate control over affairs. In addition to being a form of government and a type of state, democracy is also an order of society. A democratic society is one in which the spirit of equality and fraternity prevails. Democracy has become increasingly appealing in the modern world, especially in the second half of the 20th century because of the nature and functioning of the contemporary state.

Ideally, government is representative and accountable, representative in the sense that its policies align with citizen's interests, and accountable in the sense that it is answerable to citizens for its conduct and responsive to their demands. The *electoral* system plays an important role in determining how representative and accountable a government is in practice. In a representative democracy, decisions are made by elected representatives and implemented by appointed officials to whom the representatives delegate some of the tasks of governing. The representatives decide what citizens must and cannot do and they coerce citizens to comply with their decisions. The question of representation is why rulers would, equipped with powers, act in the best interest of others, of citizens or at least some majority thereof. This is what is meant by representation: acting in the best interest of the public. Accountability is a popular aspect of democratic theory. Too often, accountability is identified with elections or with catching out those who are charged with public responsibilities, without any sense of its *exact* contribution to our understanding of democracy. Governments are accountable if voters can discern whether governments are acting in their interests and sanction them appropriately, so that those incumbents who act in the best interest of citizens win re-election and those who do not lose them.

A direct democracy or pure democracy is a type of democracy where the people govern directly. It requires wide participation of citizens in politics. Athenian democracy or classical democracy refers to a direct democracy developed in ancient times in the Greek city-state of Athens. In direct democracy, citizens, without the intermediary of elected or appointed officials, can participate in making public decisions. Direct democracy, thus, reduces the distinction between government and the governed and between the state and civil society; it is a system of popular self-government. The second major type of democracy is referred to as representative democracy. This political arrangement establishes an intermediary political actor between the individual and the policy outputs of 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.

9.2 REPRESENTATION IN DEMOCRACY

The claim connecting democracy and representation is that under democracy governments are representative because they are elected: if elections are freely contested, if participation is widespread, and if citizens enjoy political liberties, then governments will act in the best interest of the people. Owing to the main challenge presented by direct democracy, i.e. the difficulty of each one of us representing ourselves at various forums, indirect or representative democracy was introduced. Representation is defined as the process by which political power

and influence which the entire citizenry or a part of it might have upon governmental action, with their express or implied approval, is exercised on its behalf by a small number among them, with a binding effect upon the whole community thus represented. Similarly, a representative government is understood to stand for 'the whole people', or some numerous portion of it. It exercises the ultimate controlling power through deputies periodically elected by the people themselves. J.S. Mill argued that 'the people must possess this ultimate power in all its completeness. They must be masters, whenever they please, of all the operations of government'. From this conceptualisation, five essential principles of representation in a liberal democracy stand out, namely:

- The ultimate power lies with the people (the popular sovereignty principle);
- This popular power is exercised by a select few on behalf of the many (the deputation principle);
- The deputies (or representatives) are mandated by the people through periodical elections (the popular consent principle);
- Decisions made and actions carried out by these deputies have a binding effect on the community (the governance principle); and
- As ultimate masters, the people remain the final judge of performance of the government and their deputies (the accountability principle).

Edmund Burke, an English philosopher and politician, argued that a representative should be guided by four things, namely constituency opinions, rational judgement, consideration of the national interest and personal convictions or conscience. In the modern world, most people tend to view a representative in Burke's explanation: a person with discretion and inclined or expected to act in response to local, national and personal exigencies. Since the establishment of representative institutions, their basic structure has been the same everywhere:

- Rulers, those who govern, are selected through elections
- While citizens are free to discuss, criticize, and demand at all times, they are not able to give legally binding instructions to the government
- Rulers are subject to periodic elections

Constitutions and subsidiary legislations in various countries, both at local and national levels, spell out the functions of representatives. There are common known functions such as the making of laws/ordinances/by-laws, revenue-raising, and authorisation of budgets. However, representatives (for example members of parliament and councillors) do a lot of other things sanctioned by convention, the expectations of voters, personal convictions and the fact that they are 'leaders'. Since representation is about the best interest of the 'people' or 'citizens', yet interests are in conflict. In this situation, government represents varying interests:

- A government is representative if it acts on the best available knowledge; and if individuals are sufficiently well informed so that each of them or the average one is more likely than not to reach the correct decision, this knowledge is revealed by the verdict of the majority of voters. In such situations, the government can represent individual interests, since the common interest is nothing but their sum.

- The government can represent an interest that is *collective* in the sense that everyone is better off under the centralized decision than they would have been had they all pursued individual interests. People have to be coerced for their own good; the government is representative in such situations when it pursues the collective interest.
- When the structure of interests is such that any course of action puts individuals in conflict situation, a government that pursues the best interest of a majority, at a cost to the minority, is representative. This is, after all, what majority rule is about.

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 are the essential principles of representation in a liberal democracy?

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9.3 TYPES OF REPRESENTATION

In a representative democracy elections are usually held on the basis of universal adult franchise without any discrimination on the grounds of gender, caste or religion. All voters of a community are collectively described as the electorate who choose their representatives on two alternative systems of representation:

9.3.1 Territorial Representation

Under territorial representation the country is divided into geographical areas called constituencies. Voters of each constituency elect their representatives. This system is based on the assumption that each constituency has a uniform interest. But since the population are divided into varying groups and interests it becomes imperative for introducing functional representation.

9.3.2 Functional Representation

It implies that the people belonging to different occupations or functions should be allowed to elect their representatives on a similar basis. For instance, those in industrial sector vote on industrial policy, in the agriculture sector should vote on the agriculture policy and therefore need not be consulted on other policies. The champions of functional representation argue that the representatives of a

particular territory cannot take care of all the sections of people in the territory. So people should choose representatives to decision making bodies on the basis of professional and specific economic interests. This type has largely been tried under totalitarian systems.

9.4 THEORIES OF REPRESENTATION

The different theories of representation give a conceptual clarity on the role of representatives of the people in the process of policy-making, the limits of their authority and functions.

9.4.1 Reactionary Theory

The reactionary theory is based on superior knowledge and wisdom of the politicians who are regarded as the best custodians of public interest. However, the representatives here have a limited role to convey the popular feelings for considerations and decisions. It is, in fact, an elitist theory with no provision of public control. Its chief exponent, *Thomas Hobbes* and *Hamilton* regarded order and authority as best maintained by the executive and the parliament. This theory is democratic only so long as it accepts the primacy of public interest in policy making.

9.4.2 Conservative Theory

The chief exponents of conservative theory, *Edmund Burke* and *James Madison* grant a measure of public control without encouraging popular participation in the process of government. It also allows people to choose representatives from an elite group and also depend on their good sense for instructions. However, the representatives can be replaced in case of failure of performance.

9.4.3 Liberal Theory

John Locke and *Thomas Jefferson* exemplified the true spirit of democracy. It upholds equality of all people who are endowed with equal capability to rule. The theory relies on the wisdom of the masses and treats their representatives only as their agents to translate their judgements into concrete policy.

9.4.4 Radical Theory

Its chief exponents are *Rousseau* and the *New Left*, who hold the wisdom of the people in highest esteem and go to the extent of deprecating representative government itself. It holds that wisdom of the people is bound to be diluted through the process of representation. It regards direct democracy as the *only* true democratic form of government.

In a nutshell, the radical theory of representation relegates representation to marginal importance; the conservative theory erodes the spirit of democracy by overemphasizing the gap between elites and the masses. The radical theory claims to be the most progressive as it pays highest importance to the people, but it tends to rule out representation itself. Hence the liberal theory of representation may be treated as the most suited to the requirements of representative democracy.

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) Briefly explain various theories of representation.

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9.5 ELECTION SYSTEM IN REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

The ideal electoral system in a representative democracy is one allowing all eligible citizens to cast an equally weighted vote, and for united groups of voters, except very small ones, to elect one or more of their candidates to a governing body. Approximate proportional representation on governing bodies would be a happenstance and not deliberate. Elections are instruments of democracy; they are instrumental in linking the preferences of citizens to the behaviour of policymakers. What exactly ‘linking the preferences of citizens to the behaviour of policy makers’ is supposed to mean, is the subject of normative theories of political representation and representative democracy. Political representation, as much as democracy, is an essentially contested concept and its meaning and implications differ from one normative view on political representation to the other.

Representative democracies are based upon several interrelated principles:

- The existence of regular, free, fair elections based upon universal suffrage and secret ballots.
- The existence of competing political parties offering electoral choice.
- The existence of electoral laws supervised by an independent judiciary.
- Freedom of speech and association.
- Freedom to stand as an election candidate.
- “Reasonable” relationships between votes cast and representatives elected.
- Availability of accurate unbiased political information.

The provision of election in a democracy is intended to ensure that the government will exercise its power with the consent of the governed. This means, elections lend legitimacy to the authority of the government. The real test of a genuine election is whether the voters have real alternatives before them for exercising their choice. Secret ballot is particularly important in democratic elections. An electoral system denotes the method by which:

- A voter is required to indicate his or her choice of a candidate or political party out of those contesting in the election.

- The votes obtained by a candidate or political party are translated into allocation of seats or offices.

Broadly speaking, three types of electoral systems may be identified under democratic systems.

9.5.1 Plurality System

Under Plurality system, the principle of “first past the post” is applied which means that any candidate obtaining the largest number of votes will be declared elected. It is not necessary to secure absolute majority i.e more than 50% of the total valid votes. This system is practised in British House of Commons, American House of Representatives, Indian House of People and Legislative Assemblies. However, this system of simple majority does not seem fair to the minorities as their candidates may lose by very small margins and also the votes secured by different political parties might not correspond to the number of seats won by them. The supporters of this system contend that it promotes a two party system which results in a balance between the ruling and opposition parties. It makes the majority sensitive towards the minority, prevents separatist tendencies and motivates the minorities to join the national mainstream.

9.5.2 Majoritarian System

Under this system, which requires an absolute majority, two methods are adopted to decide the winner.

- **Alternative Vote:** Under this system a voter is required to indicate his order of preference for candidates. If no one gets an absolute majority of first-preference votes, the candidate who gets the *least* number of first-preference is eliminated and the next preferences of votes are added to the first preference of those candidates. This process is repeated till some candidate gets absolute majority. This system is prevalent in India, America and Australia.
- **Second Ballot System:** Under this system a voter is required to vote for one candidate only. If no candidate is able to obtain absolute majority, second ballot is held to decide the winner.

9.5.3 Proportional Representation

This system is particularly adopted in multi-member constituencies in order to secure a fair representation for the minorities as well as the majority. It is a complex system which is implemented by several methods such as:

- **List System:** Under this system, the ballot contains separate lists of candidates of different political parties and the voter marks one list of his or her choice. Various methods of calculation of seats per list are used. The List System is employed in voting for national elections in Germany, the Italian Chamber of Deputies, the Knesset of Israel, the Swiss National Council, and Legislature of Finland.
- **Single Transferable Vote:** For each constituency, a quota is set which is usually equal to the total number of valid votes, divided by one more than the number of seats available, plus one vote. A candidate, who obtains first

preferences equal to the electoral quota, or more, is declared elected. The surplus votes are redistributed among those candidates whom these voters had given their next preference, in proportion to the number of second preferences obtained by each of such candidates. The candidate obtaining the least number of first preferences is eliminated and the next preferences of his or her voters are added to the first preferences of those candidates. This process of redistribution from both sides is repeated till the number of candidates securing the electoral quota equals the number of seats available, who are then declared elected. The *Irish Republic* and *Malta* adhere to this system of representation. Under this system, all types of ethnic groups, women, differing interests and ideologies are represented but at the same time due to diversities, the system falls short of obtaining a clear majority, thereby leading to unstable and ineffective coalitions. The system is not regarded as conducive to national integration.

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 do you understand by ‘first past the post’ system of election?

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9.6 ACCOUNTABILITY: FUNDAMENTAL TO DEMOCRACY

One of the elements that distinguish liberal representative democracies from other type of regimes is their combination of an institutional framework of authorization of political power with one oriented to ensure the responsiveness and accountability of those authorized agents. The representative is someone who has been authorized to act with relative independence of the electorate. In so far as representative democracy implies the existence of a fundamental gap between political representatives and citizens, it requires the existence of institutional mechanisms to ensure that such separation does not result in unresponsive or illegal governments. The central question addressed by the concept of accountability is precisely how to regulate and reduce the gap between representatives and the represented, while simultaneously preserving the distance between political authorities and citizenry that characterizes the relations of representation. In any democratic state there are two key accountability relationships: those that regulate the exchange between citizens and politicians, and those that regulate the interactions among public holders. The concept of accountability refers to the ability to ensure that public officials are answerable for their behaviour, in the sense of being forced to inform and justify about their decisions, and of being eventually sanctioned for those decisions.

Democratic accountability refers to the many ways in which citizens, political parties, parliaments and other democratic actors can provide feedback to, reward or sanction officials in charge of setting and enacting public policy. Democracy has many definitions, implications and consequences, but accountability is one of its most important components. Citizen participation, political equality, civic consciousness, self realization, decent treatment by authorities, sense of individual political efficacy, respect for constitutional norms, protection of human rights, responsiveness to public opinion, social and economic levelling and, of course, “freedom” have all been associated with this form of political domination – either as a defining feature or a likely product of it – but they are all contingent and vulnerable if citizens cannot reliably hold their rulers accountable for the actions that they take in the public realm. Traditional sovereigns, benevolent despots or elected autocrats might momentarily tolerate any or all of the above, but if they cannot be held accountable they can dismiss these ‘political concessions’ as irrelevant or retract from them at will. In searching for a definition of accountability, these explanations serve meaning to the concept:

- Accountability involves a mutual exchange of responsibilities and potential sanctions between citizens and rulers, made all the more complicated by the fact that in between the two are usually a varied and competitive set of representatives.
- Second, the subject matter of accountability can be quite varied: ethical behaviour, financial probity, social esteem, sexual relations, functional interdependence, familial obligation, patriotic duty, etc., but the distinctive type that interests us is political accountability, i.e. that which may accompany the exercise of asymmetric power.
- Third, all stable political regimes probably have some predictable form of accountability to some type of constituency. Sultanistic autocracies have their coterie and cadres. Military dictatorships have their juntas and complex arrangements for resolving the conflicts between the different armed services. Even absolute monarchies were supposed to be accountable to God – not to mention more earthly dynastic and marital concerns. In terms of political accountability, each citizen has the same rights and obligations, i.e. to be informed about prospective actions, to hear the justification for them and to make a judgment about how they were performed. What makes their role increasingly complex is that they have had to rely more and more upon specialized representatives, i.e. on agents who in turn act as principals when it comes to ensuring accountability of elected or appointed rulers.
- Political accountability has to be institutionalized if it is to work effectively, i.e. it has to be embedded in a stable, mutually understood and pre-established set of rules. Some of these may be formalized in a constitution, in basic legal codes or in sworn oaths, but political accountability is *not* the same as legal, financial or ethical accountability. Political accountability is not only negative. Rulers have a considerable array of mechanisms to defend themselves against such an eventuality. The rulers have so internalized the expectations of those they are ruling that they have nothing to fear from accountability; indeed, it gives them greater legitimacy when they have to act against immediate popular opinion.

Government accountability requires that public officials, elected or unelected, have an obligation to explain their decisions and actions to the citizens. Government accountability can be achieved through a number of mechanisms. These can be political, legal or administrative mechanisms designed to fight corruption and to ensure that public officials remain answerable and accessible to the people they serve. Government accountability can be achieved through the following ways:

- Conducting free and fair elections.
- Political accountability of public officials is determined by whether the officials occupy an elected versus appointed position, how often they are subjected to re-election and the number of terms they can serve in a political office.
- The legal accountability mechanisms include instruments like the constitution, legal acts, decrees, rules and regulations that prescribe actions that such public officials can and cannot take and how citizens may take action against those officials whose conduct is considered unsatisfactory. An independent judiciary is a necessity for the success of the legal accountability mechanisms, serving as the only avenue through which aggrieved citizens can bring their claims against the government.
- Administrative accountability mechanisms include offices within agencies or ministries and practices within administrative processes designed to ensure that the decisions and actions of public officials conform to the interests of the citizens.
- Electoral Accountability exists when: i) there is clarity of responsibility for political outcomes, and ii) voters can effectively sanction those responsible for those outcomes.

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) What do you understand by accountability in a democracy?

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9.7 LET US SUM UP

One of the elements that distinguish liberal representative democracies from other types of regimes is their combination of an institutional framework of authorization of political power with one oriented to ensure the responsiveness and accountability of those authorized agents. The representative is someone

who has been authorized to act with relative independence of the electorate. In so far as representative democracy implies the existence of a fundamental gap between political representatives and citizens, it requires the existence of institutional mechanisms to ensure that such separation does not result in unresponsive or illegal governments. The central question addressed by the concept of accountability is precisely how to regulate and reduce the *gap* between representatives and represented while simultaneously preserving the distance between political authorities and citizenry that characterizes the relations of representation.

Political accountability is intimately intertwined with the concept of democratic representation. It refers to a particular type of relationship that results in the act of delegating authority to a representative body, where the represented holds a claim to superior authority over those to whom it has temporarily delegated its power. A government is politically accountable if citizens have the means for punishing unresponsive or irresponsible administrations. It is usually assumed that political parties represent the essential institution of political representation and that elections are the main mechanism of political accountability that the citizenry has at its disposal to reward or punish politicians. Elections provide a regular mechanism for citizens to hold governments responsible for their actions, forcing out of office those incumbents who did not act in the best interest of voters or re-electing those who did.

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9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should include five principles, popular sovereignty, deputation, popular consent, governance and accountability.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Highlight reactionary, conservative, liberal and radical theories of representation.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Highlight that any candidate securing largest number of votes will be elected.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Your answer should highlight following points:
 - Mutual exchange of responsibilities and potential sanctions between citizens and rulers.
 - All stable political regimes have some accountability to some form of constituency.
 - Political accountability has to be institutionalised for effective work.

UNIT 10 REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY AND ITS LIMITS*

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 What is Representative Democracy?
 - 10.2.1 Limited and Indirect
 - 10.2.2 Synonymous with Electoral Democracy
- 10.3 Different Views on Representative Democracy
 - 10.3.1 Pluralist
 - 10.3.2 Elitist
 - 10.3.3 Rival Views
- 10.4 Fundamental Principles of Representative Democracy
 - 10.4.1 Popular Sovereignty
 - 10.4.2 Political Equality
 - 10.4.3 Political Liberty
- 10.5 Representative Democracy in Practice
- 10.6 Democracy and Elections
 - 10.6.1 The Election Process
- 10.7 Democracy and Alienation
- 10.8 Democracy and Public Opinion
- 10.9 Gender and Democracy: Participation and Representation
- 10.10 Democracy and the Internet
- 10.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.12 References
- 10.13 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

10.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will be reading about representative democracy, which is the form of democracy most familiar to all of us. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the meaning of representative democracy;
- Discuss different views on it;
- Enumerate the fundamental principles of representative democracy;
- Examine democracy – election interface; and
- Critically comment on some vital issues linked with representative democracy.

* Dr. Surinder Kaur Shukla, Panjab University, Chandigarh, adapted from Unit 22, EPS-11

10.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with representative democracy, the form of democracy that is prevalent world-wide. As the very name indicates, in a democracy of this type, the citizens choose their representatives through elections that are held periodically. It is these citizens' representatives who articulate their aspirations in public forums such as legislatures. As you can make out, representative democracy is synonymous with electoral democracy.

10.2 WHAT IS REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY?

10.2.1 Limited and Indirect

Representative democracy is a limited and indirect form of democracy: It is limited in the sense that participation in government is infrequent and brief, being restricted to the act of voting every few years. It is indirect in the sense that the public does not exercise power by itself, but selects those who will rule on its behalf. This form of rule is democratic only as far as representation establishes a reliable and effective link between the government and the governed.

The strengths of representative democracy include the following:

- It offers a practicable form of democracy, as large populations cannot actually participate in the governmental process.
- It relieves the ordinary citizen of the burden of decision-making, thus making it possible to have division of labour in politics.
- It maintains stability by distancing the ordinary citizen from politics thereby encouraging them to accept compromise.

10.2.2 Synonymous with Electoral Democracy

However, although these features may be a necessary precondition for representative democracy, they should not be mistaken for democracy *itself*. The democratic content in representative democracy is the idea of popular consent, expressed through the act of voting. Representative democracy is, thus, a form of electoral democracy, in that popular election is seen as the only legitimate source of political authority. Such elections must respect the principle of political equality based on universal adult franchise, irrespective of caste, colour, creed, sex, religion or economic status. Elections must be regular, open and above all competitive. The core of the democratic process is the capacity of the people to call politicians to account.

In short, the essence of representative democracy lies in:

- political pluralism
- open competition between political philosophies, movements, parties and so on

10.3 VARIOUS VIEWS ON REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

There are different views on representative democracy. The first implies that in representative democracy, political power is ultimately wielded by voters at election time. Thus, the virtue of representative democracy lies in its capacity of blind elite rule with a significant measure of political participation. Government is entrusted to politicians, but these politicians are forced to respond to popular pressures by the simple fact that the public put them there in the first place, and can later remove them. The voter exercises the same power in the political market as the consumer does in economic markets. *Joseph Schumpeter* summed it up in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (1976)* by describing representative democracy as that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for people's vote.

10.3.1 Pluralist

According to another viewpoint, democracy is pluralist in nature. In its broader sense, pluralism is a commitment to diversity or *multiplicity*. In its narrower sense, pluralism is a theory of distribution of political power. It holds that power is widely and evenly dispersed in society, instead of being concentrated in a few hands as the elitists claim. In this form, pluralism is usually seen as a theory of 'group politics' in which individuals are largely represented through their membership of organised groups, ethnic groups and these groups have access to the policy process.

10.3.2 Elitist

It refers to a minority in whose hands power, wealth or privilege is concentrated justifiably or otherwise. Elitism believes in rule by an elite or minority. Classical elitism, developed by *Mosca*, *Pareto* and *Michele*, saw elite rule as being inevitable, an unchangeable fact of social existence.

What is majority rule? Some view democracy as a majority rule. Majority rule is a practice in which priority is accounted to the will of the majority. What is majoritarianism? Majoritarianism implies insensitivity towards marginalized and individuals.

10.3.3 Rival Views

There is a considerable amount of disagreement about the meaning and significance of representative democracy. Some questions raised by scholars are as follows:

- Does it ensure a genuine and healthy dispersal of political power?
- Do democratic processes genuinely promote long-term benefits, or are they selfdefeating?
- Can political equality co-exist with economic equality?

In short, representative democracy is interpreted in different ways by different theorists. Most important among these interpretations are advanced by Pluralism, Elitism, the New Right and Marxism. For many political thinkers, representative democracy is simply superior to every other form of political organisation. Some argue that representative democracy is the form of government that best protects human rights, because it is based on the recognition of the intrinsic worth and equality of human beings.

- Others believe that democracy is the form of government which is most likely to take rational decisions because it can count on the pooled knowledge and expertise of a society's entire population.
- Others claim that democracies are stable and long-lasting because their elected leaders enjoy a strong sense of legitimacy.
- Still others believe that representative democracy is most conducive to economic growth and well being.
- Some believe that in representative democracy, human beings (because they are free) are best able to develop their natural capacities and talents. Yet, democracy remains a work in progress – an evolving aspiration rather than a finished product.

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 representative democracy?

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2) Discuss the different views on representative democracy.

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10.4 FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

10.4.1 Popular Sovereignty

It means that the ultimate source of all public authority is the people, and that the government does what the people want to be done. Four observable conditions can be recognised in popular sovereignty:

- Government policies reflect what the people want
- People participate in the political process
- Information is available and debate takes place
- Majority rules, i.e., policies are decided on the basis of what a majority of people want.

10.4.2 Political Equality

According to this principle, each person carries equal weight in the conduct of public affairs, irrespective of caste, colour, creed, sex or religion. But political thinkers believed that great inequalities in economic circumstances can eventually turn into political inequality. *Robert Dahl* describes the problem in following words, ‘if citizens are unequal in economic resources... they are likely to be unequal in political resources; and political equality will be impossible to achieve.’ Particularly important in modern times is the unequal influence in the control of information and financial contributions to electoral campaigns. This unequal influence represents a serious barrier in achieving a complete democracy. The ideal society for the practice of democracy, according to *Aristotle*, was the one with a large middle class – without an arrogant and overbearing wealthy class and without a discontented poverty-stricken class.

10.4.3 Political Liberty

According to this principle, citizens in democracy are protected from government interference in the exercise of basic freedom, such as freedom of speech, association, movement and conscience. It is said that liberty and democracy are inseparable. The concept of self-government implies not only the right to vote, right to run for public office but also the right to expression, to petition the government, to join any political party, interest group or social movement. In the practice of democracy, however, it has emerged that liberty can be threatened by democracy rather than being an essential ingredient. Following are the main criticisms that are levelled against democracy:

- ‘Majority Tyranny’ threatens liberty: Majority tyranny implies the suppression of rights and liberties of a minority by the majority. It is believed that unbridled majority rule leaves no room for the claims of minorities. Nevertheless, the threat of majority tyranny can be exaggerated. *Robert Dahl* points out that there is *no* evidence to support the belief that the rights of ethnic and religious minorities are better protected under alternative forms of political decision-making.
- Democracy leads to bad decisions: It is argued by some that representative democracy, which is majoritarian by nature, is not perfect. They say that

there is no guarantee that representative democracy will always lead to a good decision. A majority, like the minority, can be unwise, cruel and uncaring and can be misled by unscrupulous or incompetent leaders.

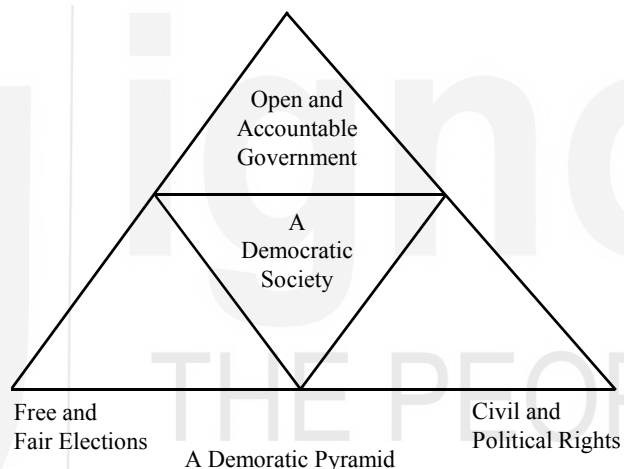
10.5 REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY IN PRACTICE

Having said this, let us now pay attention to the actual working of representative democracy.

The chief characteristics of a functioning democracy are:

- Free and fair elections
- Open and accountable government
- Civil and political rights

The figure given below gives a good idea of these features.



(from David Beetham and Kevin Boyle, *Democracy*, 1995, p.28)

Political Parties: Political parties play a crucial part in the political process. In a large measure, political parties determine the operational character of the democratic system. They provide a major political dynamic for the working of formal institutions of the system. According to *R.G. Gettell*, a political party consists of a group of citizens more or less organised, who act as a political unit. By the use of their voting power, they aim to control the government and carry out their general policies. Some of the essential features of a political party are:

- a) People constituting a political party have a certain degree of agreement on fundamental principles.
- b) They seek to achieve their objectives through constitutional means.
- c) A political party aims to further national interest rather than sectional interest.
- d) It seeks to capture political power to enable it to further public interest.

Political parties constitute the backbone of democracy and perform the following functions:

- i) *Parties mould public opinion:* Political parties stimulate the interest of public on different issues and problems such as housing, living standards, education, foreign relations, budget etc.

- ii) *Parties play a role in the conduct of elections:* Elections to the legislature are held on party lines. Political parties select suitable candidates for party tickets. On the day of voting, parties ensure the maximum turnout of voters.
- iii) *Political parties form the government:* The party which secures the majority forms the government. If no single party secures the majority, then a combination of parties, called coalition, form the government.
- iv) *The opposition acts as a check on government:* The opposition parties keep a vigilant eye on the actions and policies of government and highlights its lapses and failures.
- v) *Political parties form a link between government and people:* Parties explain the policies of government to the people and convey reactions of the people to parliament and public officials.
- vi) *Political parties impart education to people:* Political parties make the people aware of their political rights and stakes in government.
- vii) *Political parties act as a unifying force:* Political parties are compelled to seek support of all sections of people, living in different parts of the country. Thus, they act as a unifying force.

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 is Popular Sovereignty? Explain in your own words.

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2) Write an essay on Representative Democracy in practice.

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10.6 DEMOCRACY AND ELECTIONS

Modern democratic states have representative governments. Large size and population of modern democratic states make it difficult to practice direct democracy as a form of government. Hence, all modern democracies have indirect or representative governments, which are elected by people. These representatives

are chosen by the people through elections. Thus, elections have assumed a very important role in the formation of modern representative democracy. An election is a contest between different political parties for getting people's support. At times, an individual can also contest an election as an *independent* candidate. The advantages of contesting elections as a party candidate are as follows:

- i) Political parties follow specific policies; therefore, when a candidate represents a party, it is easier for voters to know what he stands for.
- ii) Party candidates get funds from political parties to organise election campaigns.
- iii) Party volunteers may be provided by the party to the candidate during the process of electioneering.
- iv) Well-known leaders of the party canvass for party candidates and address their rallies.

10.6.1 The Election Process

Elections in a democratic system are based on the principle of equality i.e. one person, one vote. All persons irrespective of caste, colour, creed, sex or religion enjoy certain political rights. Among these rights, the most important right is the right to vote. In politics, everyone is equal-every person has an equal say in the formation of government.

Secret Ballot: The voter casts his vote secretly in an enclosure, so that no one comes to know of the choice he has made. In representative democracy, secret voting is preferred; otherwise, the voter may not exercise his true choice openly due to fear of intimidation and undue influence.

Constituency: Constituencies are marked in order to carry out the election process with efficiency. Constituency is the territorial area from where a candidate contests elections. If only one person is to be elected from a constituency, it is called a singlemember constituency. If several representatives are elected from the same constituency, then it is called a multi-member constituency. The entire election process, e.g. in India, is conducted, controlled and supervised by an independent body called the Election Commission (Article 324). It ensures free and fair elections. The Election Commission fixes and announces the dates of elections in our country.

The Election Commission has another very important responsibility. It makes sure that the party in power does not get undue advantage over other parties. The process of election runs through several formal stages. This process comprises of:

- a) Announcement of dates
- b) Filing of nomination papers
- c) Scrutiny of applications
- d) Withdrawal of applications
- e) Publication of the final list
- f) Campaigning
- g) Casting of votes

h) **Announcement of results**

In fact, the moment the Election Commission announces the dates of elections, political parties start their activities. The first task of political parties becomes the selection of candidates who are going to contest in elections as their party candidates. *Modern* electioneering is a *cumbersome* process. It needs a huge organisation to manage it, which is provided by political parties. Moreover, elections require a reasonable amount of fund, which is also provided by political parties.

i) **Selection of Candidates**

In the functioning of representative democracy, the role of political parties has become both, indispensable and very important. In fact, political parties have given an organized shape to democratic politics. Political parties field and support their candidates, and organise their campaigns. Every political party announces specific programmes and promises to implement these programmes in case it comes to power. Voters while casting votes for a candidate of a particular party do so knowing well the programmes and policies of that party.

ii) **Nomination**

Once election dates are announced, political parties have to choose their candidates through a process of selection. Then, candidates have to file their nominations to election offices which are appointed by the Election Commission. There is a last date for filing nomination papers. After all nominations have been filed, there is a process of scrutiny. It is done to check whether all information given in nomination papers is correct. If there is a doubt or a candidate is not found eligible, his/her nomination paper is rejected. Once the scrutiny is over, candidates are given a date for withdrawal. The withdrawal process makes sure that (a) there is as little wastage of votes as possible and (b) that all names printed on ballot paper are those of serious candidates.

iii) **Symbols**

Political parties have symbols which are allotted by the Election Commission (EC). The EC allots symbols to each political party and makes sure that they are not similar because they can confuse voters. In India and other developing societies, the symbols are significant for the following reasons:

- They are a help for illiterate voters who cannot read names of candidates.
- They help in differentiating between two candidates having the same name.
- They reflect ideology of the concerned political party.

iv) **Campaigning**

Campaigning is the process by which a candidate tries to persuade voters to vote for him/her rather than for others. Campaigning normally stops 48 hours before polling. Each political party and every candidate tries to reach as many voters as possible. A number of campaign techniques are involved in the election process. Some of these are:

- Holding of public meetings which are addressed by candidates and a number of local and national leaders of a party.
- Pasting of posters on walls and putting up large and small hoardings on roadside.
- Distinction of handbills which highlight main issues of their manifesto.
- Taking out procession in support of different candidates.
- Door-to-door appeal by influential people in party and locality.
- Broadcasting and telecasting speeches of various party leaders.

v) **Counting of Votes and Declaration of Results**

After voting is over, ballot boxes are sealed and taken to counting centres. During counting, the candidate or his representative is present. After counting, a candidate getting a simple majority is declared elected. At times, *simple* majority leads to *problems*. The elected candidate represents majority when there are *only two* candidates, but *not* so if there are three or more candidates; e.g. if A gets 40 and B, C and D get 20 votes, then A is declared elected. Now, though A has got 40 votes, he does *not* reflect the majority because 60 votes are *actually* against him. Elections are a very important part of democracy because the entire fortification of a democratic system depends on how elections are held.

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 are elections important in a democracy?

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2) Should a person be excluded from the right to vote?

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10.7 DEMOCRACY AND ALIENATION

Alienation amounts to separation or detachment from one's genuine or essential nature. In *actual* practice, most democratic systems fare *poorly* by the standards of personal autonomy and popular rule. What passes for democracy in the modern world tends to be a limited and indirect form of democracy, thereby alienating the individual citizen. This democracy is little more than, what *Joseph Schumpeter* referred to as an 'institutional arrangement' for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for peoples' vote. This institutional arrangement has been criticised by radical democrats for reducing popular participation to a near *meaningless ritual* i.e. casting a vote every few years for politicians who can only be removed by replacing them with another set of politicians. In short, people never rule and the growing gulf between government and people is reflected in the spread of inertia, apathy and alienation.

10.8 DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC OPINION

To a great extent, democracy depends on public opinion. In a representative democracy, every government has to think of what will be the public reaction to its policies. All parties want to capture and retain power. Coming back to power in the next successive election depends on what people think about its work when a party was in power. Strong public opinion plays a very significant role in capture of power and forming government by a single party or a combination of parties, called coalition. If the public is alert and intelligent and keeps itself informed, government cannot take the risk of disregarding people's aspirations. If it disregards their aspirations, it instantly becomes unpopular. On the other hand, if public is not alert and intelligent, government can become irresponsible. At times, this might threaten the very foundations of democracy.

Formulation of Public Opinion: Public opinion is formed in many ways and several agencies contribute in shaping public opinion. For a healthy public opinion, citizens should know what is happening around them, in their own country and in the world at large. A country's government makes policies not only about internal problems, but has a foreign policy also. A citizen must hear different opinions in order to make up his/her mind. Thus for democracy to work well, citizens need to apprise themselves of various views. Among the agencies, which help in formulating sound public opinion are the press, the electronic media and cinema. In today's digital age, internet, social networking sites and TV also play an important role in shaping perceptions and opinions. Political parties have their media cells and spokespersons who defend their policies at various platforms. New mediums like *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* are being used to strike a direct bond with the voters. At the individual level, democracy allows a person to contribute his/her share of opinion in decision making. For all this, there is a necessity of free discussion and argument. Democratic government gives a lot of freedom to the ordinary citizen. However, citizens have to use freedom with responsibility, restraint and discipline. If people have some grievances, they must show them through channels provided by the democratic system. Acts of indiscipline on the part of citizens might wreck the democratic set up of a system.

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) Can anyone be excluded from citizenship in a democracy?

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2) What is the role of public opinion in a democracy?

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**10.9 GENDER AND DEMOCRACY:
PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION**

The third wave of democratisation which began in the mid 1970s brought about competitive electoral politics to many countries in Latin America, East and Central Europe and parts of Africa and Asia. It was seen as a triumph for democracy as the number of electoral democracies increased from 39 in 1974 to 117 in 1998. However, as in the earlier longstanding democracies, the levels of women’s representation in new democracies are still *low* in both legislatures and executives. The struggle for political citizenship was for a long time an important goal of women’s movements. The suffrage campaigns that took place in many parts of the world in the late 19th and early 20th century were based on the assumption that the right to vote and participate in electoral processes was an important part of being a citizen. If democracies now guarantee all citizens the right to participate in the political arena, why are women so poorly represented? Does the low participation of women mean that democracies are undemocratic?

Theorists of democratisation, as mentioned earlier, have a variety of definitions of what counts as a democracy.

- At one end of the continuum, there is a minimal definition which implies that all that is needed is competitive elections.
- Mid-range definitions also emphasise the need for freedom and pluralism, such as civil rights and freedom of speech, so that state may be considered a liberal democracy.

- Neither of these definitions makes the distinction between right to participate and the ability to participate. Only the more utopian definitions that consider the ‘quality of democracy’ emphasise that democracy also implies the enjoyment of full citizenship in its broadest sense.

Citizenship is defined not just in terms of civil and political rights, but also in terms of economic and social rights that can facilitate the full participation of all in the political sphere. Democracy can be vibrant and effective only when citizens take part in an active civil society. The ‘public’ and the ‘private’: Feminists have argued for a long time that there are a number of problems with the ways in which democracy is defined, theorised and practiced. Liberal political theory is based on a division between public and private sphere. Within this model, men appear as the head of households and as abstract individuals active in public sphere, while women are relegated anachronistically to private sphere, mainly household and family works. The ‘political’ is, therefore, defined as masculine in a very profound sense. In practical terms, the manner in which political activity is conducted in most democracies means women participate to a far *lesser* extent than men, particularly at higher levels of conventional political activity. For example:

- Many women find style and substance of politics forbidding
- Even if they do decide to pursue a political career, women often experience difficulties in getting selected on winnable seats on the party’s list
- Further, as in other areas of public sphere, women find that constraints placed on them by their responsibilities in ‘private’ sphere also reduce their ability to participate in conventional political activity on same terms as men.

It would be incorrect to give an impression that there is an agreement on nature of democracy. *Lenin*, for example, has argued that liberal democracy is a screen which hides exploitation and domination of the masses. More recently, *Carole Pateman* has argued that democracy must also extend to the *workplace* – where most people spend a great part of their day – before we can be said to live under democratic conditions.

A different type of criticism of democracy argues, by pointing out that even democracy can go dangerously wrong. *Aristotle* reminded us that for its proper functioning, even a democracy needs a stable system of *law*. Democracy can otherwise become the *arbitrary* dictatorship of the many i.e. the mob rule. In a similar vein, *De Tocqueville* argued that democracy creates the possibility of a *new* form of tyranny – the tyranny of the majority. *Madison* warned of the danger of factions, which means a group-large or small – whose interest does *not* reflect the general interest of the people, and who attempt to *subvert* the democratic system for their own purposes.

Modern democracies tend to create bureaucratic organisations around themselves. According to Max Weber, the interest of the bureaucratic organisations creates a tension in democratic practice, as the bureaucracy created by democracy will have a tendency to choke off the democratic process. *Pareto* argued that, howsoever democratic a society may claim to be, it will be inevitably ruled by a powerful elite. But, it can be argued that the idea of Separation of Powers and the concept of *Checks and Balances* can go a long way in avoiding despotism. Moreover, we need to ensure that those people who make laws do not enforce them also.

10.10 DEMOCRACY AND INTERNET

No other invention of this new technological era has proliferated as rapidly as the Internet. The internet has rapidly accelerated the development of transnational relations fostering a kind of mutual influence and interdependence. The Internet affects democracy in a number of ways. Its role in combating totalitarian regimes is, indeed, positive, for it creates access to information and thus, undermines the monopoly of the government in question. But on the other hand, the Internet creates problems also for democracy insofar as it weakens the state's regulative capacity. The transnational interpretation of societies by the Internet undermines the capacity of governments to govern effectively. Further, as far as national security is concerned, the Internet has opened up new possibilities for asymmetrical conflicts. States can sustain massive damage from netbased attacks, not from other states but from individuals. Nevertheless, the new information technology will probably, on balance, reinforce the existing power structures rather than weaken them.

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) Examine the reasons for the poor political participation and representation of women.

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- 2) How has the Internet impacted upon democracy?

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10.11 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have read about representative democracy which is the modern form of democracy. You should be now in a position to explain its meaning as well as discuss different views on it. The unit, it is hoped, has also made clear to you the fundamental principles of representative democracy. How democracy actually works – the electoral process has been elaborated in the unit. Finally and equally importantly, vital contemporary concerns such as the issues of gender, alienation and public opinion have been discussed in the unit.

10.12 REFERENCES

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10.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should:
 - Mention how it is an indirect form of democracy and enumerate its main features.
- 2) Your answer should highlight the views of Elitists, Pluralists and others.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Your answer should highlight rule by the people.
- 2) Your answer should highlight facts of free and fair elections, open and accountable government and civil and political rights.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Your answer should highlight how direct democracy is not possible and how elections are the only route to power to the people (in the form of their chosen representatives).
- 2) Your answer should be no as in politics everyone is equal.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Your answer should highlight that it can happen if a threat to civil society, law and order and national security is there.
- 2) Your answer should highlight how public opinion cannot be ignored if a political party has to hold onto power or capture it.

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) Your answer should highlight:
 - How women find politics uncomfortable.
 - Difficulties in being selected for winnable seats.
 - Responsibilities of private sphere impacting public/political sphere.
- 2) Your answer should highlight that internet breaks government monopoly and weakens state's governing capacity.

UNIT 11 PARTICIPATION AND DISSENT*

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Meaning of Participation
 - 11.2.1 Types of Participation
 - 11.2.2 Levels of Participation
 - 11.2.3 Factors Impacting Political Participation
 - 11.2.4 Globalisation and Online Participation
- 11.3 Dissent
 - 11.3.1 Democracy and Dissent
- 11.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.5 References
- 11.6 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

11.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to provide a basic understanding of political participation and political dissent, their features and some important proponents who have emphasized their importance. After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- Comprehend the meaning of political participation;
- Understand what dissent is; and
- Analyze the relationship between participation and dissent.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Political participation and political equality are the two main ideals of a democracy. In principle, they are both compatible but in practice, due to unequal participation, there is no political equality. This is a major problem in a representative government where accountability can be ensured by popular participation and it also allows the citizens to express their will. Political participation creates democracy from below and increases information of the people about politics of their country. Politically active and aware citizens act as a restraint on the government. A feeling of exclusion can arise even in a well established democracy as participation is not only about the form of political system, but also about how it is facilitated throughout the political cycle. It means that mere voting once in five years during elections is not enough, popular participation should be ensured in the intervening period between two elections as well. In the absence of political participation, a government loses its legitimacy and would require force to extend its rule, for ex. a dictator would not tolerate any opposition to his rule and creates an environment of fear in which there is no popular participation. Political thinkers like *J S Mill* and *Aristotle* believed

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that an individual can attain full human potential only by being an active participant in the political community. *Jean Jacques Rousseau* argued that individuals are more likely to accept a law which has been formulated by their participation and it also encourages community feeling among them. *Amartya Sen* sees freedom to participate as the main key to development. He says, “Participation can be seen to have intrinsic value for the quality of life. Indeed being able to do something through political action for oneself or for others is one of the elementary freedoms that people have reason to value.” Political thinkers from *Aristotle* to *John Dewey* have argued that political participation is vital for a government and guards against tyranny by ensuring governance through collective wisdom. It also promotes order and stability and can secure greatest good for the greatest number by allowing all citizens to express their views. However, given the diversity of any nation in terms of ethnicity, religion, language, region etc, ensuring maximum people’s participation is one of the major challenges in front of contemporary democracies.

11.2 MEANING OF PARTICIPATION

Sidney Verba and *Norman H Nie*, in their book *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality*, have defined political participation as ‘behaviour designed to affect the choice of governmental personnel and/or policies’. *Huntington* and *Nelson* in their book, *No Easy Choice: Political Participation in Developing Countries* define political participation as ‘activity by private citizens designed to influence governmental decision making’. In another definition of political participation, *H McClosky* says it is “the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and the rulers are made accountable to the ruled”. In general terms, it can be defined as those activities of citizens which affect politics. Political participation is relevant to all forms of governments, but it is central to a democracy. Verba and Nie have aptly put it — “Where few take part in decisions there is little democracy; the more participation there is in decisions, the more democracy there is”.

According to *Robert H Salisbury*, there are three intellectual usages behind political participation. One, it is regarded as a legitimizing act. As long as the citizens participate in government affairs through voting or other means, they give consent to the decisions and legitimize them. This is the central idea of a democracy. Second, there is the instrumental view of participation which sees it as a necessary means for securing political power which is required to recover losses, increase gains or enhance benefits of life for oneself or the social sector. This view has been underlining force for struggles to expand suffrage and mobilize voters. Third, the general interpretation of participation is associated mainly with *Rousseau* and *J S Mill* who saw it as a solvent of social conflicts. *Rousseau* argued that citizens would share a common understanding of general good by political participation and would be able to agree how resources should be allocated. *Mill* saw participation as a learning process and those who stay outside it will not be able to learn the rules required to reach consensus judgements.

C B Macpherson has given two requirements for the existence of a participatory democracy. First, there should be reduction in social and economic inequality. Second, people should see themselves and act as exerters and enjoyers of development instead of merely being consumers of government policies. *Samuel*

Huntington has argued that excessive demands are being placed on the political system which is eroding government authority. Too much democracy leads to decline in government authority and hence, there should be a fine balance between government authority and limits on it. *Giovanni Sartori* has said that the anti-elitists have neglected the vertical dimension (leadership) of democracy extension as they are focused on horizontal dimension i.e. participation. He supported an informed, active and interested citizenry pitching for participation in real decision making process. The *United Nations Human Development Report* gives importance to formal political participation through electoral systems and political parties. It also makes a case for better governance of political parties, increasing participation of women and minorities and curbing the role of money in politics.

11.2.1 Types of Participation

Political participation can be classified in *two* categories – conventional and unconventional. The conventional participation is routine behaviour that uses channels of the government. It can be supportive as it could be a ceremonial act of expressing support for the government or the country. Conversely, it could also try to seek a modification in the government policy. It could involve contacting the party members, politicians and government representatives or activities pertaining to the election process like campaigning and voting. Unconventional participation is relatively *uncommon* behaviour working against government channels or the dominant culture and hence, it is stressful for *both* participants and their opponents. Such type of participation may not structurally be embedded in the political system and that is why, it can be illegal. A number of activities like unlawful demonstrations, boycotts, signing the petitions, political violence etc come under its ambit. It has been successful in a number of occasions in influencing government decisions – like the civil rights movement in the US. There are three features shared by people who participate in unconventional ways:

- Group consciousness
- Sense of political efficacy
- Mistrust of the political system.

Initial studies on political participation focused mainly on activities like campaign and voting. However, in the 1960s, the scope was widened to include unconventional activities like protesting and petitioning. Such activities were also called elite challenging as they posed a new challenge before the ruling elites. With the advent of the internet, online participation is becoming a new form of political participation through which people express their political views.

Michael Rush and *Phillip Althoff Nelson* in their 1971 book, *An Introduction to Political Sociology* listed the following activities as political participation:

- Holding or seeking political/administrative office.
- Active/passive membership in a political organization.
- Active/passive membership in a quasi-political organization (like pressure groups).
- Participation in public meetings, demonstrations etc.
- Participation in informal political discussion.

- General interest in politics.
- Voting for elections.
- Indifference or lack of interest in political activities leading to political apathy.

11.2.2 Levels of Participation

Verba and Nie have given various levels of political participation.

- **Inactives** – These are the people who rarely vote and keep a distance from political organizations as well.
- **Voting Specialists** – Such people vote but apart from that, they do not participate in political activities.
- **Parochial Participants** – They neither vote nor do they participate in election campaigns or civic associations. But, they are not averse to contacting local officials for personal issues.
- **Communalists** – Such people mainly stay engaged in local community politics and their education and income is similar to that of the campaigners.
- **Campaigners** – They not only vote but also like to campaign. Their education level is higher than that of average voters and they are able to take clear cut political positions due to clear party affiliation.
- **Complete Activists** – Such individuals regularly promote a political party and its political ideals.

11.2.3 Factors Impacting Political Participation

There are a number of factors that have an impact on political participation. They are listed below.

- **Psychological Factors** – An individual's psychology plays an important role in his level of political participation. Lonely people like politics as it involves meeting people at various levels. Some people want to be powerful and participate in politics to achieve this aim. Another important aspect is of system trust, which refers to an individual's trust in the political system including the political leaders and parties. If the political system is trusted by people, there is likely to be high political participation. A system that is not trusted may not see high level of political participation from its citizens.
- **Social Factors** – Education level of an individual is critical in deciding his/her inclination for political participation. Better educated people have a good civic sense and confidence to air their political views. Similarly, people with higher incomes participate more than others. Occupation is also a factor here. Teachers, traders and government servants have higher levels of political participation as their occupations are directly impacted by government policies. Sex and age also play a part in participation. Women tend to participate less than men in political activities due to their domestic duties, lack of resources, caste factor and lack of education. India's economic survey of 2017-18 highlights low level of women's participation in politics. It adds that factors like lack of confidence, financial resources and support

from family are some of the factors that do not allow women to participate in political activities. It further adds that in the Parliament, women MP's constitute only 12% of the total membership. *Age* is also factor as middle aged people participate more than youths and older ones. Other factors include residence (rural or city) and religion.

- **Political Factors** – In case the voting rules are simple, there is high political participation. Too much or too low confidence in the government can lower political participation. Political parties also impact participation through their various activities during and after elections like rallies, mobilizing voters, campaigns etc. Grass root democracy at village and city level also plays a part in sensitizing citizens towards political issues. There are a number of mobilizing agencies like the media, associations and civic groups which play an important part in increasing political participation in a country.
- **Social Capital** – The network of relationships among people in a society is called social capital. These relationships can be at individual level or through membership of civil society organisations, religious organisations or interest groups. Generally, high social capital leads to high level of political participation in a society. It helps in maintenance of democracy by impacting quality and quantity of political participation. Civil society organisations and other voluntary organisations have political interests which are fulfilled by mobilising their members leading to increase in political participation. The main dimensions of social capital like political expertise, frequency of political interaction and network size, all of them impact an individual's political participation.

In contrast to political participation, one can also see political apathy in a country which is characterized by a feeling of indifference towards politics. It can be witnessed in the decline in voter turnout in a country. Political apathy could breed corruption and moral decline among leaders as they do not face public scrutiny. Youths and minorities are generally seen as sections that do not have interest in politics. Some people may be content with the political system and hence, do not feel any need to participate. Others may feel that there is no scope for change since every political party behaves in a similar fashion which leads to political apathy. Some may not be sure of their own political leanings while others may not have time and energy for politics.

11.2.4 Globalisation and Online Participation

The internet has become an important medium for political participation. People sign petitions online while they also express political support or protest through social media these days. This has prompted the political parties to maintain active social media cells which try to influence public opinion and generate favourable political participation. Online participation can give voice to the marginalised sections like women and help in their empowerment as well. Some *critics* believe that online participation does not reflect the reality of offline world and these opinions can be artificially manufactured using technology as a tool. Globalisation is blurring the political boundaries at the global level leading to what some experts call Global Citizenship. This is evident from increasing concerns over human rights violations and efforts to address climate change. These issues generate political participation beyond borders as global survival

is at stake. In this context, globalisation seems to have transformed the meaning of citizenship and political participation. Global outcry can put pressure on a government to address concerns of its citizens. However, internet can also play its part in downfall of a government as was the case during the *Arab Spring* in West Asia. This can prompt the state to crackdown on online participation to ensure its own stability.

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 is the concept of political participation? Elaborate.

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2) What are the determining factors of political participation?

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11.3 DISSENT

Democracies are based on consent by the people that they are ready to be governed by their elected representatives. However, there may be people who hold other views and have difference of opinion with government policies. Dissent is defined as “an unwillingness to cooperate with an established source of authority, which can be social, cultural, or governmental.” As already explained, dissent is unconventional type of political participation and it may not be embedded in the political system; that is why, it can be seen as illegal by the state. Activities like protests, marches, boycotts, self-immolations and civil disobedience are seen as acts of dissent. In its extreme form, dissent can turn violent and see a revolution (overthrow of the present government) as its aim and would invite retaliation from the government of the day. Dissent can be collective or individual and organized or spontaneous. A certain type of political dissent is found in all democracies in form of moral criticism of the system and emphasising systemic problems. This is basically public scrutiny of government policies. It does not aim to achieve political power (unlike revolutionaries) and resorts to critical evaluation of political system and culture. By using violence, political dissidents would lose higher moral ground of defending people’s interests and would be treated as extremists who want to achieve political power.

Dissent is both feared and appreciated. If it happened in the glorious, unthreatening past or takes place in distant lands, then dissent is appreciated. Some famous dissenters include *Martin Luther, Socrates, M K Gandhi* and *Galileo*. If they are successful, dissenters are appreciated and can be targeted if unsuccessful. However, dissent would look unattractive to those whose power is threatened by it.

In his book, *A theory of Justice*, John Rawls has argued that civil disobedience helps in maintaining just institutions. Along with free and regular elections and an independent judiciary, civil disobedience used with restraint and judgement can strengthen just institutions. *Marxists* believe that communist societies are free of political disobedience as everyone will do as per his capacity and get as per his need. Also, people identify themselves with community well being instead of individual interests in a communist society. Social contract theorist, *Thomas Hobbes* in his book, *Leviathan*, has argued that individuals consent to obey the state in return for being protected against violence and threats of violence. If the state cannot provide protection, citizens have the right to disobey its rules. Another social contract theorist, *John Locke* in his book, *Second Treatise*, has argued that a state is legitimate because it enjoys consent of its citizens. The purpose of the state is to enforce the law of nature and in case it is unable to do so, the citizens no longer are obliged to obey the government. *J S Mill* has further said, "If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind". Dissent is associated with critical thinking which seeks to question accepted notions of authority, truth and meaning. *Immanuel Kant* called it 'leading an examined life'. *Michel Foucault*, one of the main critics of liberalism and the *Frankfurt School* regarded dissent as positive and it's near absence in the 19th- and 20th-century democracies created problems in these states. Contemporary democracies are believed to encourage self-censorship, ideals of normality, or intellectually restricted forms of culture. Such a democracy would hinder critical thinking; minimize dissent and public deliberation.

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) Discuss John Rawl's and Thomas Hobbes's views on dissent.

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11.3.1 Democracy and Dissent

The relationship between the state and dissent has been a *complex* one where the state usually sees dissent as a threat and tries to regulate it. Historically, authoritarian governments have never given space to opposition in their political

sphere. From *Hitler, Stalin to Mao*, all dictators have systematically eliminated any political dissent which could have otherwise threatened their authority. Hitler used means like civil service purges, concentration camps and unfair trials to settle score with his opponents while Mao attacked intellectuals, removed party officials and also limited organized opposition. Similar repressive policies were also adopted by Joseph Stalin to keep his authority supreme in the former Soviet Union. In such political systems (which are also described as state terror by some experts), deference and conformity run high due to the fear of persecution. However, in democracies, there is always room for expressing one's views which may be opposed to the government of the day. Some of the rights that deal with expressing dissent in a democracy include:

- The Freedom of Speech and Expression – French philosopher *Voltaire* had famously said, “I may not agree with what you have to say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.” In a democratic country, right to freely express views forms the backbone of freedom. There should be no external interference in an individual's practice of this right. However, one also has to take into account the fact that this right needs to be cautiously used as feelings of others also should be kept in mind.
- Freedom of Association and Assembly – Positively, it would mean that an individual has a right to be associated with the groups or organizations of his choice. Negatively, it means that a person can avoid association with organizations where his interests do not match. Both these aspects of this right should be protected by law of the land. A person has the freedom of assembly, but it is not the freedom to assemble at *any* given place, since properties of others cannot be violated.
- Political Participation – In a democracy, political participation can be seen as protecting one's right to dissent. By exercising this right, an individual can vote against a government whose policies are contrary to his/her interests.
- Due Process of Law – This right protects one's other rights concerning dissent. Due process makes sure that an impartial procedure exists by which any act of dissent can be examined.

However, it could be erroneous to assume that the right to dissent is fully protected in democracies. If a government feels insecure and threatened during internal unrest, it is likely to use force against dissent depending on the medium of protest as well. The level of threat perceived by the government from an act of dissent would also determine its response. Academics believe that a democracy is less likely to see dissent as a threat as ‘democracies are generally more legitimate forms of government as well as more tolerant of dissident behaviour’. Democratic systems also provide ‘institutionalised and legitimate channels’ through which citizens and political opponents can express their dissent. This benefits the government as well as the dissenters as the opposition groups are *less* inclined to use violence to voice their discontent. Hence, their actions are not perceived as threats by the government which in turn, remains less inclined to use repression against dissenters. It means that there is no place for violence as a tool to be used in a democracy for expressing dissent. In a democracy, right to dissent protects one's most basic civil liberties against the government's emphasis on

security. It allows a public debate between liberty and security through public institutions that safeguard free speech and debate, the media, judiciary and ultimately, through general elections. If a society has to be truly democratic, free and critical thinking will form an essential part of it. It was only due to critical thinking that *Galileo* and *Copernicus* were able to prove that the Sun is at the centre of the solar system. There are many other instances to show that dissent has been successful – it was dissent that ended apartheid in South Africa. It can help in the achievement of a less unjust society.

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) Which rights protect a person’s right to dissent in a democracy?

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11.4 LET US SUM UP

Political participation and dissent are two important virtues of any democracy. Participation ensures that the government remains accountable to the people. Conventional participation adds legitimacy to government policies while unconventional participation (dissent) like protests and boycotts challenge the government. It is a challenge for modern day democracies as to how to increase political participation and decrease dissent at the same time. In democracies, non-violent dissent can be expressed through rights like – freedom of speech and expression, freedom of association and assembly and due process of law. Even political participation also allows an individual to express dissent as one can vote against a government whose policies a person does not like. But, use of violence for dissent would invite repression from the state as it is perceived as a threat to democracy. For a society to be democratic in spirit, critical thinking has to be a vital part of it.

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11.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should include views of Sidney Verba and Norman H Nie, Huntington, Nelson and H McClosky.
- 2) Highlight psychological, social and political factors apart from social capital.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) John Rawls argued that dissent helps in maintaining just institutions; Thomas Hobbes highlighted the social contract between the individual and the state.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Your answer should include rights like freedom of speech and expression, freedom of association and assembly, political participation and due process of law.

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UNIT 12 DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP*

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Democracy: The Concept
- 12.3 Procedural/Minimalist and Substantive/Maximalist Dimension
- 12.4 Types of Democracy
 - 12.4.1 Direct Democracy
 - 12.4.2 Representative Democracy
- 12.5 Citizenship
 - 12.5.1 Development of the Concept of Citizenship
- 12.6 Relationship between Democracy and Citizenship
 - 12.6.1 Rights and Responsibilities
 - 12.6.2 Active and Passive Participation
 - 12.6.3 Issues of Identity
- 12.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.8 References
- 12.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

12.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will explore the idea of democracy and citizenship. After studying this unit, you would be able to:

- Explain the meaning of democracy;
- Understand the concept of citizenship and its development over the centuries; and
- Analyse the relationship between democracy and citizenship.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Democracy is generally understood as ‘government of the people, by the people, and for the people’ and that is why; it cannot survive without citizenship. With the advent of representative democracies, there is a shift towards passive citizenship from active which could be seen as the challenge of legitimacy in front of the state. Citizens’ support for democracy is a key requirement for its sustainability while lack of popular support could be exploited by authoritarian forces for their own benefits. Hence, in the contemporary context, it becomes important to analyze the relationship between democracy and citizenship.

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12.2 DEMOCRACY: THE CONCEPT

The concept of democracy is more than 2500 years old having first appeared in Athens in the 5th century BC. Likewise, the word democracy has a Greek origin derived from the word ‘demokratia’. It is a combination of two Greek words, ‘demos’ meaning people and ‘kratos’ meaning power. Hence, democracy stands for rule by the people. It is one of the most debated issues in the field of Political Science as it is a ‘contested concept’. This means, although there is a general agreement on the meaning of democracy, there are differences on how to implement it. Consequently, there are different types of democracy: direct, representative, deliberative etc. The agreement is on the idea that democracy means popular rule and sovereignty, but how that will be achieved varies. There are, however, some inherent contradictions in the way democracy is practiced. How to achieve people’s participation, the balance between liberty and equality, protection of minority rights and to avoid the tyranny of majority etc are some of the questions which democracies have to grapple with. One of the central problems faced by democracies all over the world is how to balance between liberty and equality. The English liberal tradition gives more importance to liberty, while the French tradition treats equality as superior to liberty. Negative liberty places more emphasis on the individual and his rights while positive liberty talks of limiting these rights to attain equality. This means that negative liberty favours a limited role for the state, while positive liberty wants state intervention to create conditions where equality could exist.

That notwithstanding, there are a number of advantages that a democracy has over other forms of governments. It prevents rule of the oppressors, fosters human development, facilitates protection of individual rights and freedoms and could even prevent wars at the international level as democracies normally do not fight against each other. In his 1861 book, *Considerations on Representative Government*, J S Mill has given three advantages of democratic decision making over non-democratic ones. First, strategically, democracy compels decision makers to take into account interests, opinions and rights of most of the people which would not be the case in an authoritarian or aristocratic form of government. Second, epistemologically, democracy brings in a number of varied views in the process which allows decision makers to pick up the best ideas. Third, democracy also helps in character building of citizens as it inculcates qualities like rationality, autonomy and independent thinking. This creates pressure of public opinion on political leaders who cannot ignore people’s views in order to remain in power. In this context, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has touched upon the relationship between democracy and famines, arguing that there have been no famines in a functioning democracy as the leaders are accountable to the people and cannot ignore their basic welfare.

Former Prime Minister of United Kingdom, Winston Churchill had reservations about democracy, but he still said that it was the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time. Understood in a broader sense, democracy is not only a form of government and state, but it is also a condition of society or a way of life. A democratic society is one in which there is socio-economic equality while a democratic state is one where citizens get a chance to participate in open and fair political process. Radical democrats in the 1960s and the 1970s believed that socio-economic equality

was a precondition for the success of political democracy. Some frequent meanings attributed to the term democracy are as follows:

- Rule by the poor and disadvantaged, their political participation and assertion.
- Society based on equal opportunity and individual merit instead of hierarchy and privilege.
- Welfare and redistribution to reduce social inequality.
- Decision making based on majority rule.
- Protection of minority rights by placing checks on majority rule.
- Fulfilling public offices through competition for popular vote.

In a broader sense, a number of features can be attributed to democracy. A written constitution, the rule of law, human rights, independent media and judiciary, separation of powers between the executive, the judiciary and the legislature could be described as some of the basic features of democracy. The idea of democracy has come a long way from its initial form in Greece when it was not inclusive in nature. The Greek model of democracy excluded women, slaves and immigrants making it ‘undemocratic’ in spirit. This spirit continued even in modern democracies like France, Britain and the US where some sections were not allowed to vote while the voting rights were given to wealthy men. The French Revolution of 1789 talked about liberty, equality and fraternity apart from popular sovereignty for the mankind. However, the women did not get the right to vote, and it was only in 1944 that France started universal adult suffrage. In Britain, women got the right to vote in 1928 while in the US, they got this right in 1920. However, discrimination on the basis of colour remained in the US, and it was only in 1965 that the African American women and males were given the right to vote. India has been progressive in this regard compared to Western democracies as India adopted the universal adult franchise from 1950 when its constitution came into force and it became world’s first democratic state to have universal adult franchise since its inception. Saudi Arabia is the latest country which has allowed women to vote and in 2015, women for the first time exercised their right to vote in the municipal elections.

12.3 PROCEDURAL/MINIMALIST AND SUBSTANTIVE/MAXIMALIST DIMENSION

Democracy could be well understood by two different views – procedural (minimalist) and substantive (maximalist). The procedural dimension merely focuses on procedures or means in place to attain democracy. It argues that regular competitive elections on the basis of universal adult franchise and plural political participation would produce a democratically elected government. In his 1942 book, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, Joseph Schumpeter has said that democracy is “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote”. Huntington has also echoed similar views saying, “The central procedure of democracy is the selection of leaders through competitive elections by the people they govern.” However, people are perceived as passive beyond electoral participation in minimalist view and thus are governed by their representatives. This view does not focus on liberty and freedom as it

emphasizes how to elect a democratic government. In the absence of checks and balances in the system, the elected leaders could manipulate procedures and power for their own benefit leading to concealed authoritarianism. The government could work for the elites who hold power instead of the people who should hold ultimate authority in a democratic set up. Such instances have existed in Argentina and Brazil between 1980s and 1990s. The governments in Central Asian countries too could be described as procedural democracies as the power has been concentrated in hands of a single individual although periodic elections are held from time to time. Terry Karl has pointed that minimalist view could also lead to a ‘fallacy of electoralism’, a situation where electoral process is given priority over other dimensions of democracy. Fareed Zakaria calls it ‘illiberal democracy’, a case where governments are democratically elected but ignore constitutional limits on their power and deprive their citizens of basic rights and freedoms.

Substantive democracy tries to overcome the shortcomings of procedural view arguing that social and economic differences could hamper people’s participation in the democratic process. It focuses on outcomes like social equality instead of ends in order to truly work for the governed. In a sense, it talks about ‘common good’ rather than benefit of limited individuals. The rights of marginalized sections like women and the poor are protected through redistributive justice so that conditions can be created through state intervention for their participation in political process. Various political scientists like John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill have contributed to the emergence of this view. Unlike Schumpeter who believed that conception of democracy which aim for ambitious forms of equality are dangerous, Rousseau argued that a formal variety of democracy is equivalent to slavery and its only egalitarian democracies which have political legitimacy.

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) According to J S Mill, what are the advantages of democratic decision making?

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2) What are the differences between procedural and substantive dimensions of democracy?

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12.4 TYPES OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy can be classified as direct and representative depending on how the people rule. Direct democracy is based on direct and unmediated citizen participation in government rule. All adult citizens take part in decision making sure that all the viewpoints are discussed and best possible decisions are taken.

12.4.1 Direct Democracy

It wipes out the distinction between the government and the governed and the state and civil society. The ancient Greek city-state model was an example of direct democracy. In contemporary times, direct democracy can be found in Swiss cantons. In the Greek model, there was physical presence of the citizens in the assembly to ensure their participation. However, the Swiss model is slightly different as it depends on methods like initiative, recall and plebiscite to ensure popular participation in policy making. The initiative gives people the power to propose legislation which should be discussed by the legislature. Recall is the power in hands of the people through which they can remove their policy makers if their performance is not up to the mark. In a plebiscite, an important question is put in front of the citizens for their approval or disapproval. Direct democracy ensures greater legitimacy as people are more likely to follow decisions which are taken by them only. It also creates a highly informed citizenry which participates in decision making. However, there is a vast difference in size (geography, population) between a city-state and a nation-state. That is why; practising direct democracy is difficult in big modern nation states. This issue was solved with the development of representative democracy, which first appeared in northern Europe in the 18th century.

12.4.2 Representative Democracy

It is a limited and indirect form of democracy. It is limited because popular participation in policy-making is very less pertaining to voting in a few years while it is indirect as people do not exercise power directly but through their elected representatives. Presidential and parliamentary democracies are two main types of representative democracies around the world. There are more parliamentary democracies around the world than the presidential democracies. Parliamentary democracies are more representative than the presidential, but at the same time, they are relatively less stable.

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 is the difference between direct and representative democracy?

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12.5 CITIZENSHIP

In its earliest form, citizenship focused on the city instead of the state as is evident from the experience of ancient Greek city states or polis. In general terms, citizenship is a relationship between an individual and state. It is seen in the context of complementary rights and responsibilities. According to *T H Marshall*, citizenship is ‘full and equal membership in a political community’. There are certain rights, duties, and responsibilities that citizens have, but they can either be denied or partially extended to aliens and other noncitizens residing in a country. Generally, full political rights like the right to vote and to hold public office are extended to citizens only. The usual responsibilities that the citizens have towards the state include allegiance, taxation, and military service. According to *Kymlicka and Norman*, there are three basic dimensions of citizenship. The first dimension is that citizenship is a legal status which depends on civil, political and social rights. In this sense, the citizen can act within the limits of law as a free citizen and retains the right to have protection of law. However, it does not mean that the citizen takes part in formulation of law. Also, it does not indicate that the rights will be uniform between citizens. The second aspect is that the citizens are seen as political agents as they are expected to actively participate in political activities of a society through its political institutions. The last dimension considers citizenship to be membership in a political community which creates a unique identity. Such understanding of citizenship rules out the fact that it also has an identity dimension like shared history, culture, religion or language and focuses only on a nation state perspective.

There are mainly three discourses on citizenship namely civic republicanism, liberal and critical. Civic republicanism stands for love and service to one’s political community, local, state and national. It argues for strong civic values or civic literacy which is an important component of citizenship. It requires identification with and commitment to the goals of political community gained through the process of education and active engagement in democratic process. On the other hand, the liberal discourse gives importance to individual rights and autonomy. It also highlights deliberative values of discussion, disagreement and consensus building. Political liberalism envisions citizenship that takes a critical attitude towards all authority keeping focus on liberty. There are two sides to liberal political citizenship. One, the citizen is entitled to rights and equal treatment and two, citizens are participants in self-rule. The third discourse on citizenship is critical which challenges the civic republicans and political liberals. It includes feminist, re-constructionist, cultural and transnational perspectives. It raises critical questions about identity (who are citizens), membership (who belongs and the location of boundaries) and *agency* (how we might best enact citizenship). Critical discourse focuses on exclusion based on gender, culture, ethnicity, nationality, race, sexuality or socio-economic class and tries to broaden and deepen liberal agendas of human freedom.

12.5.1 Development of the Concept of Citizenship

The concept of citizenship goes back to the ancient Greek city-states where the population was divided into two classes —the citizens and the slaves. The citizens enjoyed both civil and political rights. They directly or indirectly participated in

all the functions of the civil and political life of the state. Whereas the slaves enjoyed none of such rights and suffered from all kinds of political and economic disabilities. Even women were not given citizenship rights which were reserved only for 'free native-born men'. In this way in ancient Greece the term 'citizen' was used in its narrow sense. Only those who enjoyed civil and political rights and who participated in functions of the civil and political life of people were regarded as citizens. A similar process was followed in ancient Rome where people belonging to only the rich class, known as Patricians, were privileged to enjoy civil and political rights. Only the Patricians participated in the functions of civil and political life of the state. The rest of the population was not privileged to enjoy any of such rights. The citizens were required to develop qualities of 'civic virtue', a term derived from the Latin word 'virtus' which meant 'manliness' in the sense of performing military duty, patriotism, and devotion to duty and the law. The concept of national citizenship virtually disappeared in Europe during the Middle Ages, replaced as it was by a system of feudal rights and obligations. In the medieval times, citizenship was associated with protection by the state as the absolute states wanted to impose their authority over their diverse population. It was in tradition with the social contract theorists like Hobbes and Locke who believed that it is the main aim of the sovereign to protect individual life and property. It was a passive understanding of citizenship as the individual depended on state for security. This notion was challenged by the French Revolution in 1789 and in 'The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen', the citizen was described as a free and autonomous individual. The modern notion of citizenship seeks to strike a balance between freedom and equality. Inequalities like caste, class, gender etc are being eliminated by providing conditions of equality through affirmative action.

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 three dimensions of citizenship?

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12.6 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP

The relationship between democracy and citizenship includes the debate over rights and responsibilities, active and passive citizenship and issues of identity. They are discussed in succeeding paragraphs.

12.6.1 Rights and Responsibility

Citizens not only have rights but they also have certain responsibilities so that the harmonious balance between the two is not disturbed. Others must recognize and respect an individual's rights while we too have the same responsibility.

One may claim the right to free speech and expression but this right carries the responsibility that the claimant recognizes and respects this right for others as well. In contemporary liberal democracies, there is more emphasis on rights than responsibility. It means that the citizens are passive holders of rights while they did not develop public virtues of responsibility towards the nation. *Robert Dahl* said that the citizens should respect the rights and obligations of others as well as themselves. He also argued that citizens should possess the ability to engage in free and open discussions with others about the problems they face together. In a democracy, an individual has rights against the state which the state should respect. In case there is a violation, there is an independent judiciary which will help the individual. However, in authoritarian states, instead of rights, more emphasis is given on duties and responsibilities. Individual rights can be violated as the state is considered supreme.

12.6.2 Active and Passive Participation

Participation by citizens in a democracy adds legitimacy to government policies. Political participation and political equality are two main ideals of a democracy. In principle, they are both compatible but in practice, due to unequal participation, there is no political equality. This is a major problem in a representative government where accountability can be ensured by popular participation and it also allows the citizens to express their will. Political participation creates democracy from below and increases information of the people about politics of their country. Politically active and aware citizens act as a restraint on the government. A feeling of exclusion can arise even in a well established democracy, as participation is not only about the form of political system but also about how it is facilitated throughout the political cycle. It means that mere voting once in five years during elections is not enough, popular participation should be ensured in the intervening period between two elections as well. In the absence of political participation, a government loses its legitimacy and would require force to extend its rule, for ex. a dictator would not tolerate any opposition to his rule and creates an environment of fear in which there is no popular participation. Political scientists like *J S Mill* and *Aristotle* believed that an individual can attain full human potential only by being an active participant in the political community. *Jean Jacques Rousseau* argued that individuals are more likely to accept a law which has been formulated by their participation and it also encourages community feeling among them. Political scientists from *Aristotle* to *John Dewey* have argued that political participation is vital for a government and guards against tyranny by ensuring governance through collective wisdom. It also promotes order and stability and can secure greatest good for the greatest number by allowing all citizens to express their views. However, given the diversity of any nation in terms of ethnicity, religion, language, region etc, ensuring maximum people's participation is one of the major challenges in front of contemporary representative democracies.

C B Macpherson has given two requirements for existence of a participatory democracy. First, there should be reduction in social and economic inequality. Second, people should see themselves and act as exerts and enjoyers of development instead of merely being consumers of government policies. *Samuel Huntington* has argued that excessive demands are being placed on the political system which is eroding government authority. Too much democracy leads to decline in government authority and hence, there should be a fine balance between

government authority and limits on it. Giovanni Sartori has said that the anti-elitists have neglected the vertical dimension (leadership) of democracy extension as they are focused on horizontal dimension i.e. participation. He supported an informed, active and interested citizenry pitching for participation in real decision making process.

In ancient Greece where direct democracy was practiced, there was active participation of citizens in political community. Citizens were responsible for the formation of policies and laws by attending assemblies and holding offices. However, this form of active participation can only be realised in small political communities. With rise of representative democracies, active participation has given way to a passive one. The liberal emphasis on rights over responsibilities has tended to dismiss the obligation to participate in public life and has caused the rise of passive citizenship. However, this may tempt the state to ignore citizen's interests from policy making. Citizenship is a dynamic concept which keeps changing from time to time and active citizenship ensures that the state takes care of the rights of its citizens while passive citizens can be manipulated by the state. *Gerald Delanty* has argued that unless citizenship is linked to democracy, citizenship will be reduced to being a pre-political privatism and, on the other side; democracy will be separated from civil society. Citizenship is learned through education, socialization, exposure to politics, public life, and day-to-day experiences. Active citizenship is more than voting or fulfilling public obligations. It is not only choosing officials and using the system; but also involves making and shaping the system's structures and rules.

12.6.3 Issues of Identity

As an expression of one's membership in a political community, citizenship involves a link between people of different identities in an active commitment to membership of a common political community, where a shared citizenship identity is fundamental to the achievement of a genuinely democratic society. In fact, one of the problems for contemporary democracy is of recognizing the differences without falling into a situation in which the citizens see themselves as the bearers of exclusively particular identities. Hence, the debate is over whether there should be focus on 'differences rather than common and shared elements' while formulating citizenship in a country. This brings out the debate about citizenship and multiculturalism. Since modern societies are increasingly being recognised as multicultural due to internal diversity and globalization, the liberal understanding of the idea of citizenship focusing on the individual is being challenged now. Critiques opine that specific contexts like cultural, religious, ethnic, linguistic etc. should be the determining factors of citizenship. Equal rights of citizens are seen in contradiction with group-rights and the culture of minority groups. *Will Kymlicka* in his 1995 book, '*Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*' has argued that certain sorts of collective rights for minority cultures are consistent with liberal democratic principles, and that standard liberal objections to recognizing such rights on grounds of individual freedom, social justice, and national unity, can be answered. Some liberals worry that granting concessions to national or ethnic groups hurts democracy: democracy, for them, requires a common citizenship based on treating people identically as individuals. When a particular group seeks some accommodation, this requires us to treat people differently based on their group affiliation, which strikes many as illiberal. *Kymlicka* argues that request for

accommodation actually reflects minorities’ desire to integrate. For example, Orthodox Jews in the US seek an exemption from military dress codes so they can wear their yarmulkas. They want the exemption not that they can be different, but so that they can join the army and be like everybody else.

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) What are Kymlicka’s views on minority rights?

.....

2) What is the importance of political participation in a democracy?

.....

12.7 LET US SUM UP

Democracy is generally understood as ‘government of the people, by the people, and for the people’ and that is why; it cannot survive without citizenship. With the advent of representative democracies, there is a shift towards passive citizenship from active which could be seen as the challenge of legitimacy in front of the state. Citizens’ support for democracy is a key requirement for its sustainability while lack of popular support could be exploited by authoritarian forces for their own benefits. The relationship between democracy and citizenship can be analyzed along three dimensions. First is the rights and responsibility dimension. In contemporary liberal democracies, there is more emphasis on rights than responsibility. It means that citizens are passive holders of rights while they do not develop public virtues of responsibility towards the nation. Second, there was active citizenship in ancient Greek democracies but with the advent of representative democracies, passive citizenship has become more visible. Individuals need to keep in mind that active citizenship is more than voting or fulfilling public obligations. It is not only choosing officials and using the system; but also involves making and shaping the system’s structures and rules. Lastly, there is a debate over whether there should be focus on ‘differences rather than common and shared elements’ while formulating citizenship in a country. This brings out the debate about citizenship and multiculturalism. Will Kymlicka has argued that certain sorts of ‘collective rights’ for minority cultures

are consistent with liberal democratic principles, and that standard liberal objections to recognizing such rights on grounds of individual freedom, social justice, and national unity, can be answered. He further argues that request for accommodation of cultural rights actually reflects minorities' desire to integrate and not to remain autonomous in citizenship.

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12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should highlight following points:
 - Accommodation of opinions of different groups.
 - Possibility of best ideas being picked.
 - Facilitates character building.
- 2) Your answer should highlight that procedural democracy gives more importance to procedures while substantive democracy focuses on outcomes.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Your answer should highlight participation by all citizens against rule by elected representatives.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Your answer should highlight the following three dimensions:
 - Citizenship is a legal status.

- Citizens seen as political agents.
- Membership of a political community.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Your answer should highlight the following three points:
 - Minority rights are not against the principle of liberal democracy.
 - Special rights for minorities actually facilitate their integration in the mainstream.
- 2) Your answer should highlight that political participation adds legitimacy to the government policies and ensures accountability.



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