

## Is Democracy is the Best Form of Government System?

For the past 2500 years this question has been tossed up. Some said rule of one, others preferred rule of few, while a third party was of the view that neither rule of one nor of few but rule of majority is good. In this discussion, it would appear later that democracy is either the most hated or the most admired form of government. Rationally speaking, democracy, like every other system of governance, has its seamy side. That it has become more an end in itself than a means to attaining such ends as: freedom, equality, rule of law and justice which are its underlying values without which democracy loses its meaning. Unless accompanied by its underlying values democracy is indistinguishable from any other system of governance and is as bad as any other form of government could be. A dictator may rule democratically, and a democratic government could be tyrannical and oppressive. It is therefore the content, which makes democracy the most admirable form of government, rather than the form by which Voltaire meant when he said that: it makes no difference to a poor man whether he is devoured by a lion or hundred rats.

It is perhaps better to begin with definitions. Abraham Lincoln rendered a definition of democracy in these words: a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. By democracy it is meant that people should rule themselves; or rule of people. Moreover democracy is a form of government in which members are elected to rule by the consent of people and are accountable to people. Their rule is not arbitrary but they have to conduct their business in accordance with the rules enacted in constitution. This document which is called constitution defines fundamental rights of people besides provides the framework through which government is to run the affairs of state. However if government acts in contravention with the rules people have inherent right to topple such a government and institute a new one in its place.

The origin of democracy lies in the Athenian democracy of which Pericles, the leader of democracy in Athens, boasted that; here, there is the government in which every citizen renders his contribution however little it may be. But happy days of Athenian democracy did not last long in the face of militaristic Spartans who defeated Athens in Peloponnesian war. Socrates who witnessed all these developments was quick to attribute failure to democracy which according to him was riddled with factionalism, corruption and nepotism. This ultimately brought doom to Athens. Henceforth the aging philosopher developed a particular contempt for democracy and declared it the worst form of government. In a democracy, he says, party interests precede those of the national interests. It seems that he did not see security in numbers and declared that only knowledge has claim to power. When the War was finally over the democracy which he condemned voted him to death.

Plato the faithful student of Socrates inherited his master's contempt for democracy and wrote the Republic to prove that tyranny of Philosopher King is better than democracy, by declaring that he went to other extreme: totalitarianism. However Socrates' and Plato's hatred of democracy had some measures of truth in it. The Athenian democracy was pervaded by corruption, factionalism and party interests claimed precedence over the national interests. These were the reasons which caused Plato and Socrates to despise democracy. Nevertheless, their contempt for democracy reflected their hatred of national and regional politics of that time. To a large extent their criticism is not based on rational grounds, although the democracy was not without its faults but yet it was the best form of government for which Greeks developed great love and respect. Because it guaranteed freedom of thought and expression which Greeks boasted of, and therefore regarded all other civilizations as barbaric. Even the giant Persians were looked down as uncivilized nation. The proof of this is the fact that Plato's theory of Philosopher king was received rather with contempt by the freedom loving Greeks who regarded it as alien and barbaric. This was precisely the reason which forced Plato to write Laws and Statesman in which Law would be supreme and it was the second best ideal state of Plato.

For Aristotle the chief problem lies in the irreconcilable conflict between freedom and authority. He was much closer to liberal democracy but stood diametrically opposed to his master's theory of Philosopher King and regarded it as opposed to the frailties of human nature. The conflict between freedom and authority was the actual task which possessed him the most, and which culminated in the form of constitutional government; be it democracy provided majority presents tasks and only the experts render execution and implementation of those tasks. Implicitly this was democracy at its best. Expounder of constitutionalism Aristotle did not contend his master's words that only knowledge has claim to power.

From Greeks down to Dark and Middle ages democracy remained a ray of hope for the distressed. It was regarded as an antidote to oppressive and despotic rule. It is an effective weapon of all freedom loving nations to fight tyranny. In Europe, the Age of Reason renewed the faith of people in democratic rule; therefore masses challenged the traditional and ancient institutions which stifled freedom of people. It was this renewed conviction that helped abolishing feudalism thereby paving the way for a just system of governance. The Glorious Revolution in England marked the beginning of the democratic age. It established representative government through sovereignty of parliament. The other Europeans would follow the suit later.

Nonetheless the followers of Plato still haunted the democratic forces. They opposed and mocked the people who were fighting for democracy and rule of law. Thomas Hobbes was the first among them to oppose any changes in the existing governmental system which kept people under perpetual slavery. However it would be clear by the fact that Hobbes criticism of people's rule stemmed from his emotional attachment to the unity of England.

Since the civil war plagued England before the revolution. Hobbes believed that a strong hand is needed to subdue the uprising and therefore preached the divine right of kings to rule. On the other hand stood John Locke whose ideals were embedded in democratic values ; he supported the revolution which culminated in the sovereignty of parliament.

The propounder of modern absolutism Machiavelli confronted similar issues in his home land Italy where Papacy rule crippled the growth of society and kept people under perpetual subordination. Besides It was in able to defend Italy against foreign aggression. His opposition to democracy found expression in his book the Prince. Prince according to him would be instrumental in restoring peace and glory to Italy and defend it against any foreign intrusions. The integrity of Italy, It seems, was sacred to him and thus he equipped his prince with unbridled powers to safeguard that. However close observation would reveal that his philosophy of absolutism is a product of particular circumstances which confronted Italy during that time and to overcome them seems his immediate concern. He might have renounced it had he lived to see Hitler.

It is an interesting question that what possessed people of Europe to stand against well equipped oppressive regimes and what attracted them to seek salvation in democracy. Masses suffered at the hands of religious and temporal rulers; the latter were in alliance. Besides, economic exploitation and infliction of tyrannical rule left people to virtual slavery. Submission to such rule anymore was death on the other hand democracy offered freedom and equality for which the people of Europe yearned. Who would ignore such presents. It was this reason that democracy found ready appeal among the masses who rose and fought for it. The American and French Revolution were the culmination of people's quest for a free world where law, not the discretion of kings, would rule. The independence of America and the subsequent enactment of its constitution which ensured freedom, equality and rule of law, marked the beginning of a new age in the history of democracy.

However it is an other question that the minority Negroes were suppressed in a country whose constitution defined: "all people created as equal". It is this question the possibility of which confirmed that a democratic regime could also be oppressive and tyrannical. Nonetheless the white majority was never short of arguments and was quick to justify it; that when constitution speaks of equality it meant equality of all whites. It was paradoxical. Here Rousseau's theory of General Will was in work practically simultaneously confirming the doubts of Voltaire that General will or Majority rule would tend to be more oppressive to dissenting minority. The issue which questioned the primacy of democracy as being an ideal form of government.

These were the inherent weaknesses in democratic system which gave rise to Communist manifesto: classless society. And it was the age of Hegel, the spiritual father of Karl Marx, who was pleading his case of Dialectical Theory; thesis, antithesis, synthesis, in Europe.

The theory, through which Karl Marx was to prove later the doom of democracy. Hegel suggested that every tendency breeds its antithesis at the very moment it is born. The idea he applied to feudalism as thesis, democracy as its antithesis and communism which Karl Marx was to declare later as synthesis; the final destiny of humanity, and the best system of governance. Communists were quick to attack capitalist democracy which according to them encourages economic exploitation of working class by industrialists; hence effecting concentration of wealth in to few hands. Which causes socio economic imbalance in society . However communists fail to prove that under communism there will be no such exploitation and masses would suffer less. It is at least implicit in the communist manifesto. Their aim it seems was to bring one party, which they called Proletariat, into power It will decide the destiny of ruled. None the less a dictatorship.

At least democracy offers safer options. However bad, democracy is better than dictatorship, said someone .But the vexing issue was one that of sub-ordination of minority at the hands of majority in democratic system . To reconcile these two opposing tendencies was the task that occupied the attention of John Stuart Mill, the father of Neo-liberalism. Who said that it is not necessary that a popular government should also be a liberal government. Contradicting his own statement our philosopher says that threat to democracy is not from government but from a majority that is intolerant of diversity and uses its numbers to repress the minority. Therefore behind every liberal government there should be a liberal society. Repression of black population in America and South Africa may be viewed in this paradigm. Not to democracy but tyranny may be attributed to an intolerant society.

One of the peculiarities of democratic system is that it affords an opportunity for resolving issues through negotiations. It was through this means that Martin Luther King was successful in his struggle against segregation against the blacks in America. The firm belief in the democracy offered blacks an equal status in the society that crippled their freedom formerly. However struggle is sine qua non for achieving ideals ingrained in democratic values. “ Privileged class never gives up its privileges, you have to fight for them,” says Martin Luther King.

Similarly, the case of repression by the minority Whites against the majority blacks in South Africa reflected the same dilemma of an intolerant society. Nelson Mandela the leader of Blacks understood the perils if the majority Blacks came into power; the danger was that of suppression of the minority Whites. Therefore the struggle he launched against Apartheid ( a system of laws which stifled the freedom of the Blacks) was directed against the system and institutions which chained the Blacks. It was never against the Whites. Mandela acknowledged that, that he was laying grounds for mutual co-existence between whites and Blacks after the freedom was won. Moreover democracy helped South Africa achieving social, political and economic cohesion. On the Contrary, Communist Revolution hardly achieved desired results. The imposition of dictatorship

soon after the fall of Czar regime resulted only in the national disintegration ones the cold war was over.

In the same way the argument that democracy is a success in one society and its failure in other is not enough to prove that democracy is not the ideal form of government. To substantiate it the critics offer examples of third world democratic countries such as Pakistan. The logical answer to the criticism is that for a liberal democracy to succeed there should be a liberal society. The more a society is liberal the greater are the chances of democracy to succeed. The words of Plato may be relevant when he said: unless we have better men we could not have better society or state. For a better democracy there must be a better society. Unless it is done society can not avail itself the benefits a democratic system has to offer.

As it has frequently appeared in the course of discussion that democracy is not an end itself rather is a means to achieve ends which are ingrained in the democratic values such as; freedom equality and rule of law. However the Politics of Modern Times have observed a paradigm shift from ends to means, the latter have become more important to popular governments. Democracy is promoted but liberty is not Says Fareed Zakria in his book the Future of Freedom. Similarly election is the first step forward to achieving the ends in constitutional liberalism, and is an integral part therefore of any democratic system. Viewed in any other perspective it has no meaning of its own. Unfortunately, political parties lay greater emphasis on the election campaigns and spend heavily to secure victory but pay little attention to the goals set for a democratic government to achieve. Secondly the growth of illiberal tendencies in democratic world should be a greater cause of concern for the modern societies. The greater threat today to democracy is from illiberal democracy. Its success depends largely upon the elimination of illiberal practices which stifle freedom of society. To put it in a nutshell, if society is to avail what democracy has to offer, it must direct its energies to fight illiberal democracy. And in doing that lays the salvation of humanity. Otherwise ruin is at hand amidst Nuclear world