

CIVICS

Chapter 2: Democracy in the Contemporary World



Democracy in the Contemporary World

Military Coup in Chile in 1973

- Chile is a country in South America bordering Peru, Bolivia, and Argentina. Salvador Allende was elected as the President of Chile in 1970. After becoming the President, he formulated various policies for the upliftment of the poor section of society.
- He was opposed to many foreign companies which were taking over the country's natural resources. Thus, he was opposed by the landlords, the rich and the Church.
- On 11 September 1973, the military forced President Allende to
- resign from his office. When he refused, he was killed in a military attack. This was a famous military coup in Chile.
- The coup was led by the army general Augusto Pinochet. He was secretly supported by America as the latter did not approve the policies of Allende.
- Military dictatorship was established in Chile, and Pinochet became the President of the country. He ruled Chile for the next 17 years.
- Thousands of supporters of Allende and those who favoured democracy were tortured and killed. More than 3,000 people were killed by the military and many more were reported to be missing.
- Albert Bachelet of the Chilean Air Force and many others who had refused to join the coup were killed.



General Augusto Pinochet led a military coup in Chile in 1973.

Restoration of Democracy

- Pinochet decided to hold a referendum in 1988 as he was confident that the people will vote for him.
- However, the people of Chile were not in favour of a dictatorial government and voted 'no' to Pinochet's rule.
- Pinochet thus lost his political and military powers, and Chile once again became a democratic nation.
- The army's role in politics was also drastically reduced.
- Michelle Bachelet was elected as the President of Chile on January 2006.

Poland – Communism to Democracy

- Poland is a country located in Central Europe. In 1980, it was ruled by the Polish Workers' Party. No other political party was allowed to function in Poland. The Government of Poland was controlled by the Government of the erstwhile Soviet Union.
- People did not have any fundamental freedom. They could not speak against the members and policies of the ruling party.
- On 14 August 1980, the workers of Lenin Shipyard in the city of Gdansk went on strike in support of a female worker who was unjustly dismissed from service. This strike was illegal as any trade union independent of the ruling party was not allowed to function in Poland.
- Walesa, a former electrician of the shipyard, joined the strikers. He became the leader of the workers and demanded an increase in pay.
- The union also demanded the right to form trade unions, release of political prisoners and an end to censorship on the press.
- As the movement spread rapidly, the Government signed a 21-point programme with the trade union led by Walesa. The Government agreed to give rights to the workers to form independent trade unions and the right to protest.
- A new trade union called 'Solidarity' was formed independently of the communist government.
- Thousands of members joined Solidarity. The members now began to question corruption and mismanagement of government officials.
- The Government led by Wojciech Jaruzelski imposed martial law in December 1981 in Poland. Thousands of Solidarity members were put into prison, and the freedom to express, organise and protest were taken away from the people.
- Later, when the Polish Government became weak because of economic uncertainties, the members of Solidarity again protested against the Government. In April 1989, the Government gave into the demands and free elections were held in Poland.
- Solidarity secured 99 out of 100 seats in the Senate. Walesa was elected as the President of Poland.

We thus see that democracy is a form of government in which people choose their own representatives, and the people have the freedom to express their opinion, freedom to organise and freedom to protest.

Democracy in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Some facts about democracy in the world

- Democracy has expanded in the twentieth century.
- The spread of democracy has been uneven in the world. Democratic governments were first established in one region and then they spread to the other regions.
- Although most countries are democratic at present, larger parts of the world are still under undemocratic governments.

The Beginning and Expansion of Democracy in the World

The French Revolution was a landmark event in the world as it inspired people of other countries in their struggle against dictatorial governments.

Although the struggle for democracy in Britain had started much earlier, the results were too slow. The powers of monarchy reduced gradually, and not all people had the right to vote initially.

In 1776, the American Revolution led to the formation of the democratic government in America, and only few people had the right to vote. In the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century, only wealthy people had the right to vote. It was only after the common people protested that the right to vote was given to every citizen. When the right to vote is granted to every citizen of the country above a certain age, it is known as universal adult franchise or universal suffrage.

By 1900, New Zealand was the only country where every adult had the right to vote.

The end of colonialism in many countries of Asia and Africa also led to the establishment of democratic governments. India became a democratic country in 1947.

Ghana an African nation became independent from the British rule under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah. However, the latter got himself elected as the President of the country for life. In 1996, he was overthrown by the military. Many countries could not remain democracies for long after attaining independence from their imperial rulers.

By late 1980, many countries became democratic. The disintegration of USSR further accelerated this process. When USSR disintegrated into 15 countries, the political map of the world underwent a great change.

Many changes also took place in the neighboring countries of India. While Pakistan and Bangladesh saw a transition from the military to the democratic form of government, the powers of the king in Nepal was considerably reduced.

However, many countries are still undemocratic at present. Myanmar is one such country. It is

under military rule. The leader of the National League, Aung San Suu Kyi, has been under house arrest as she wants a Aung San Suu Kyi democratic rule in Myanmar. Many people who support democracy have been jailed and killed. People in Myanmar are still struggling for establishing a democratic government.



Aung San Suu Kyi

Democracy in the International Organisation

- The United Nations has 192 member countries. Each country has one vote in the General Assembly. This makes the UN look like a very democratic organisation.
- However, the General Assembly cannot take any decision in case of war among the countries. Such decisions are taken by the Security Council. The Security Council has five permanent members—USA, Russia, France, UK and China. Ten other members are elected for a term of two years.
- Only the five permanent members have the real power to take any decision in case of wars. Each country has veto power. This means that the Security Council cannot take any decision if any permanent member country says 'no' to that decision. This has led many countries to demand that the US become more democratic.
- International Monetary Fund lends money to countries. It has 173 member countries, but all do not have equal voting rights. Nearly half of the powers in the IMF are in the hands of seven countries—USA, Japan, Russia, France, Saudi Arabia, UK and China. The remaining 166 countries have very little powers.
- The President of the World Bank has always been a citizen of the US. This shows the influence of the US in the policies of the World Bank.
- The above facts show that most global institutions are not very democratic.

Promotion of Democracy

- Iraq is an example which shows us how some democratic countries intervene in the internal

affairs of other countries in the name of establishing democracy there.

- Since 1968, Iraq was ruled by the military ruler Saddam Hussein, a leader of the Ba'ath Party. The Government under Saddam was dictatorial where basic freedoms to the people were denied. Many political opponents were killed, and ethnic minorities were massacred.
- On allegations that Iraq possessed secret nuclear and chemical weapons which can destroy the world, the US and its allies invaded Iraq and removed Saddam Hussein from power in 2006.
- What is more significant is that this war on Iraq was not authorized by the UN Security Council and was described as illegal by the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan.

Therefore, we see democratic countries taking undemocratic decisions when it suits their own interests



Iraqis protesting against the US invasion of Iraq

Important Questions

Multiple Choice questions-

Question 1. Both Chile and Poland had some common features: These were:

(a) the people could not choose or change their rulers (b) the people could choose or change their rules (c) no real freedom to express one's opinions, form political associations and organise protests and political action (d) real freedom for the people

(a) (a) and (d)

(b) (a) and (b)

(c) (a) and (c)

(d) (c) and (d)

Question 2. Democracy is the form of government that:

(a) Is not chosen by the people

(b) Allows citizens to choose their representatives

(c) Allows people to choose their rulers

(d) None of the above

Question 3. In a democracy:

(a) Only leaders elected by the people should rule the country

(b) People have the freedom to express views, freedom to organise and freedom to protest

(c) Both (a) and (b)

(d) None of the above

Question 4. Democracy has expanded throughout the:

(a) Nineteenth century

(b) Twentieth century

(c) Twenty first century

(d) None of the above

Question 5. The British colonies in North America declared themselves independent in:

(a) 1775

(b) 1776

(c) 1777

(d) 1778

Question 6. The United States of America adopted a democratic constitution in:

(a) 1787

(b) 1788

(c) 1789

(d) 1790

Question 7. The only country where every adult had voting right by 1900 is:

(a) Russia

(b) Germany

(c) Britain

(d) New Zealand

Question 8. Ghana used to a be British colony named:

(a) Diamond Coast

(b) Silver Coast

(c) Gold Coast

(d) Iron Coast

Question 9. Ghana became independent in:

(a) 1956

(b) 1957

(c) 1958

(d) 1959

Question 10. By 2005, about countries were holding multi-party election.

(a) 120

(b) 130

(c) 140

(d) 150

Question 11. One of the biggest moneylenders for any country in the world is the:

(a) USA

(b) World Bank

(c) International Monetary Fund

(d) none of the above

Question 12. Saddam Hussein became President of Iraq in:

(a) 1977

(b) 1978

(c) 1979

(d) 1980

Question 13. The US and its allies invaded Iraq, occupied it and removed Saddam Hussein from power in:

(a) 2003

(b) 2004

(c) 2005

(d) 2006

Question 14. Allende was the founder leader of the Socialist Party of Chile and led the Popular Unity Coalition to victory in the Presidential election in:

(a) 1960

(b) 1965

(c) 1970

(d) 1975

Question 15. The military took over the seaport on the morning of 11 September:

(a) 1970

(b) 1971

(c) 1972

(d) 1973

Very Short:

1. How is Allende pronounced?
2. When was Allende's government overthrown?
3. When was Allende made President of Chile?
4. Mention the name of the political party which came to power in Chile in 1970.
5. Who succeeded Allende in Chile in a military coup?
6. Where is Calama located?
7. How did the women of Calama demonstrate their grief?
8. Which state in our country has a shape similar to Chile?
9. Can you find, examples similar to what happened to Women of Calama from other countries?
10. Can you identify who is the President of Chile now?

Short Questions:

1. Mention the several steps taken by the Allende's government to help the poor workers.?
2. Give two reasons Why Allende's political party was popular in Chile?
3. What did Pinochet's regime do after overthrowing Allende's government in Chile in 1973?
4. Why did Allende refer to "workers" in his speech? Why would have the rich opposed to him?
5. Think why would women and children of Calama were asked to keep quiet? Why people could not react to those events?
6. How was Poland ruled in 1980?
7. Why did the strike begin in Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk?

Long Questions:

1. How would you describe Salazar's regime? as a dictatorship? Elections were held in Salazar's Portugal. Why should it not be called a democracy?
2. The late 17th century and the early 20th century saw some "democracies" in the world. Why were they not called democracies in the sense we use in the world today?
3. Where do you place Ghana as a democratic nation?
4. Explain with examples as to how democracy has been adopted in the world since 1990s.
5. Give a detailed account of developments that took place in Myanmar since 1990.

Answer Key:

MCQ:

1. (b) (a) and (b)
2. (c) Allows people to choose their rulers
3. (c) Both (a) and (b)
4. (b) Twentieth century
5. (b) 1776
6. (a) 1787
7. (d) New Zealand
8. (c) Gold Coast
9. (b) 1957
10. (c) 140
11. (c) International Monetary Fund

12.(c) 1979

13.(a) 2003

14.(c) 1970

15.(b) 1973

Very Short Answer:

1. Allende is pronounced as Avendo.
2. Allende's government was overthrown on September 11, 1973.
3. Salvador Allende was made the President of Chile in 1970.
4. Popular Unity.
5. General Augusta Planchet succeeded Allende.
6. Calama is located about thousand miles away from the capital of Chile, Santiago.
7. They remained silence, always in silence.
8. Kerala
9. In Russia during the Czarist regime.
10. Michelle Bachelet (Jan 2006).

Short Answer:

Ans: 1. The Allende's government, in Chile, took several steps to help the poor workers.

These included

- reforms in the educational system,
- free milk for children,
- redistribution of land among the farmers.

Ans: 2. Allende's political party, the Popular Unity was popular in Chile for reasons given below:

It was opposed to foreign companies exploiting natural resources (copper) against the interests of the people of Chile.

The rich opposed the Allende's political party, though the workers, by and large, liked Allende's efforts.

Ans: 3. Pinochet's regime, after taking over the power, began torturing people and killing those who were supporting Allende. In the process, more than 2000 people were killed by the military regime. Many more were, reported 'missing'. No one knows what had happened to them.

Ans: 4. Before Allende's government was taken over by Pinochet's military regime, he got the opportunity to address his people, referring them as 'workers'; The rich-opposed Allende because his policies were pro-workers and pro-poor.

Ans: 5. The women and children of Calama were asked to keep quiet because if they spoke, their children would be killed by the military. People, could not react to military's torture because they knew that if they reacted, they would also be tortured

Ans: 6. Poland, in 1980, was ruled by the Polish United Worker Party. Then there was a one-party monopoly of power in Poland. No one was permitted to oppose the official party line. The government trade unions owned all the factories. These trade unions were not independent of the ruling party.

Ans: 7. The workers of the Lenin Shipyard started strike in the city of Gdansk. The demand of the workers was to take back a crane operator, a woman worker, who faced an unjust dismissal from service.

Long Answer:

Ans: 1. Salazar captured power in Portugal in 1926. For about a half-century, he ruled the country as a a. dictator. He was cruel to the opposition leaders, tortured them and killed them. His government started concentration camps on a barren island to punish those involved in working-class protests. The spies and informers of the secret police were present in all public- places-cafes, railway stations, post offices/ hospitals, offices, universities and factories. Being fearful of arrest, the citizen could not dare to discuss politics in the open.

After 1945, the government allowed opposition to campaign for one month before elections. This one month of free time' was never enough to mobilise people politically for support during elections a\$ no opposition was allowed after elections. The elections were held irregularly, every four or seven years. The opposition never won a single seat in these elections.

Ans: 2. Some countries of the world could be called 'democracies' by the beginning of the twentieth century. But these countries, which became democratic in the 19th century, did not allow all people to vote. Often the women did not have a right to vote. In some countries, only people owning property had the right to vote. In the United States of America, the blacks did not have a right to vote all over the country until the second half of the twentieth century. So we cannot say that these were full democracies in the sense in. which we understand it today.

Never, the beginning for democracy had begun. These countries had some of the following things common to them:

- The governments were no more dictatorial. A measure of governmental accountability was seen.
- Some kind of limited representative systems had started.
- People had started launching movements for their rights.

Ans: 3. The country that is today called Ghana used to be a British colony called Gold

Coast. This country became independent in 1957. It was among the first counties in Africa to be liberated from colonialism. It inspired other African countries to struggle for freedom. Kwame Nkrumah, son of a goldsmith and a teacher himself was active in the independence struggle of his country. For him, like many other African nationalists, the struggle against foreign rule was linked to establishing democratic rule.

After independence, Nkrumah became the first prime minister and then the president of Ghana. He was a friend of Jawaharlal Nehru and an inspiration for democrats, in Africa. But unlike Nehru, he deviated from the path of democracy and got himself elected the president for life. Nkrumah justified his actions by arguing that “Even a system based on a democratic constitution may need backing up in the period following independence by emergency measures of a totalitarian kind”. Shortly thereafter, in 1966, he was overthrown by military, Ghana was no longer a democracy.

Ans: 4. The 1990 saw’ numerous changes in the World. The communist regime came to an end in Poland, and Hungary in eastern European countries. The USSR disintegrated as a simple country and multi-party system came to be adopted. Major changes, especially in Pakistan and Bangladesh” made a transition from army rule to democratic regime in 1990s. In Nepal, the monarch gave up many of his powers to become a constitutional monarch’ to be guided by elected leaders. These changes ‘ were not permanent and were reversed in Pakistan and Nepal. Yet the overall trend in this period is of more and more countries turning to democracy.

This phase continues till now. By 2002, about 140 countries were holding multi-party elections. This number was higher than ever before. More than 80 previously non-democratic countries have made significant advances, towards democracy, during this period. but even today, there are many countries where people cannot express their opinion freely. They still cannot elect their leaders. They cannot decide how they will live in the present and in the future.

Ans: 5. Elections were held in Myanmar (earlier Burma) in 1990. The NED (National League for Democracy), led by Aung Sang Suit Kyi won with a comprehensive victory. But the military rulers of Myanmar refused to recognize the election results and put the elected pro-democracy leaders including Suu Kyi under house arrest. Political activists, accused of even the most trivial offences, have been jailed from seven to fifteen years.

Anyone caught publicly airing view’s or issuing statements critical of the regime was sentenced up to twenty years in prison. Due to the coercive policies of the military-ruled government in Myanmar, about 6 to 10 lakh people in that country, have been uprooted from their homes and have taken shelter elsewhere.

Despite the restrictions of house arrest, Suu Kyi continued to campaign for democracy. According to her, “The quest for democracy in Myanmar is the struggle of the people to live whole, meaningful lives as free and equal members of the world community. Her struggle has won international recognition; She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Yet

the people in Myanmar are still struggling for establishing a democratic government.