

CIVICS

Chapter 6: What is Democracy? Why Democracy?



What is Democracy? Why Democracy?

What is Democracy?

Definition of Democracy

Democracy is a form of government in which the rulers are elected by the people. One chief factor common to all democracies is that the government is chosen by the people. It also helps students to demarcate between democratic and non-democratic governments. From the non-democratic government, take the example of Myanmar, where rulers were not elected by the people. Those who were in charge of the army of the country took over as rulers and people had no say in this decision. Dictators like Pinochet (Chile) are not elected by the people. This also applies to monarchies.

It is not possible to give only one definition of democracy. Democracy has many features. Some features of a democracy are

Democracy is a form of Government in which the rulers are elected by the people.

- Chile under Pinochet was not a democratic country because Pinochet was not elected by the people. Saudi Arabia is also not a democracy as it is a monarchy.

Features of Democracy

The simple definition of democracy gives rise to various questions, which are given below:

- Who are the rulers in this definition?
- What kind of election constitutes a democratic election?
- Who are the people who can elect the rulers or get elected as rulers?
- Finally, what form of government is a democracy?

In a democracy, all major decisions are made by the elected leaders.

- General Pervez Musharraf led a military coup in Pakistan in October 1999. He later changed his designation to President. He also amended the Constitution of Pakistan according to which the President could dismiss the national or provincial assemblies. Moreover, although the people elect representatives to the provincial and national assemblies, the elected representatives were not authorised to make final decisions.

- The final decisions could only be taken by Musharraf and other senior military officers who were not actually elected representatives of the people.
- Pakistan, under such circumstances cannot be called a democracy as the elected representatives of the people have the power to make major decisions in a democracy.

In a democracy, free and fair elections should be held regularly.

- In China, elections are held regularly after every five years. People elect the members of the Parliament called National People's Congress. The Parliament has the power to elect the President of the country.
- In China, only the members of the Chinese Communist party or its eight allied parties can contest elections, and thus, only the Communist party can form the Government.
- In Mexico, elections are held after every six years, but until 2000, every election was won by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (IRP). The IRP used every legal and illegal method to win the elections. Teachers in schools were forced to influence parents to vote for the IRP, media ignored all activities of the ruling party but only focused itself on criticising the opposing parties and large sums were spent on campaigning for IRP candidates.
- Thus, democracy must be based on free and fair elections where those currently in power have a fair chance of losing the elections.

Democracy should be based on the principle of one person, one vote and one value.

- In Saudi Arabia, women do not have the right to vote.
- In Fiji, the vote of a local Fiji has more value than that of an Indian Fijian.
- In Estonia, the citizenship rules are such that the people belonging to the Russian minority find it difficult to vote.
- Therefore, we find that each adult citizen must have one vote and each vote must have one value.

Rules of Law and Respect for Rights

- In Zimbabwe, President Robert Mugabe has been ruling since independence. Although Mugabe is popular, he uses unfair practices during elections.
- He has amended the Constitution multiple times in order to increase the powers of the President and to make him less accountable.

- The members of opposition parties are jailed if they raise their voice against the Government and protests against the Government and its policies are declared illegal.
- It is important for a democratic government to grant basic rights and freedoms to its citizens and the government should be accountable to its citizens.
- Therefore, a democratic government rules within the limits set by constitutional law and citizens' rights. The government must function within basic rules of the Constitution and citizens' rights.

One person, one vote, one value one value

Democracy is based on a fundamental principle of political equality. However, there are many instances of denial of the equal right to vote. Until 2015, in Saudi Arabia, women did not have the right to vote. Estonia has made its citizenship rules in such a way that people belonging to the Russian minority found it difficult to get the right to vote. In Fiji, the electoral system is such that the vote of an indigenous Fiji has more value than that of an Indian Fijian. Definitely not a democratic government. The feature of democracy this highlight is that in a democracy, each adult citizen must have one vote and in turn, each vote must have one value.

Why Democracy?

Some arguments against a democratic government are

- Democracy leads to instability as leaders keep on changing in a democratic setup.
- The decision-making process is delayed in a democracy because several people have to be consulted in a democratic setup.
- Sometimes even elected people do not know about the best interests of the people. Thus, at times, it leads to bad decisions.
- There are several cases of corruption as democracy is based on electoral competition.
- Most people do not know what democracy is. Thus, they should not decide anything.

According to these arguments, democracy does not seem to be an ideal form of government. But it is not so. The following arguments prove that democracy is the best form of government.

Cons of Democracy

- Leaders keep changing in a democracy leading to instability

- Democracy is all about political competition and power play, leaving no scope for morality
- Many people have to be consulted in a democracy that leads to delays
- Elected leaders do not know the best interest of the people, resulting in bad decisions
- Democracy leads to corruption since it is based on electoral competition
- Ordinary people don't know what is good for them; they should not decide anything

From these arguments, we can see that democracy of the kind we see, may not be the ideal form of government. However, we will see if democracy is better than other forms of government that are there for us to choose from.

A democratic government is a better government because it is a more accountable form of government.

- China suffered from one of the worst famines in 1958–1961. Nearly three crore people died in the famine. No major famine occurred in India at this time. According to economists, it was perhaps because India is a democratic country.
- Democracy in India made the Government respond to food scarcity in a way in which the Chinese Government did not. It was because India has a multi-party system and free press. The Government may be criticised and even lose the next elections.
- This is not the case with the Chinese. Because China is ruled by the Communist party and no one can criticise the Government, the Chinese Government took the famine very casually.

Arguments in Favour of Democracy

A democratic government is a better government because it is a more accountable form of government: Take the example of India and China famines in 1958-1961. While China was hit badly, India did not fare as badly, despite its economic condition. Reason for this could be that India responded to the food scarcity in a way that the Chinese government did not. Here, we see that democracy is better than any other form of government in responding to the needs of the people.

Democracy improves the quality of decision-making: Democracy is based on consultation and discussion. A democratic decision always involves many people, discussions and meetings and they are able to point out possible mistakes in any decision. This may take time. However, the advantage of taking time over important decisions is that it reduces the chances of rash or irresponsible decisions.

Democracy provides a method to deal with differences and conflicts: In any society, people are bound to have differences of opinions and interests. These differences are particularly more in a country like ours with amazing social diversity. People belong to different regions, speak different languages, practice different religions and have different castes. The preferences of one group can clash with those of other groups. How do we resolve such a conflict? Democracy provides the only peaceful solution to this problem. In a democracy, no one is a permanent winner or loser. Different groups can live with one another peacefully.

Democracy enhances the dignity of citizens: Democracy is based on the principle of political equality. It recognises that the poorest and the least educated have the same status as the rich and the educated.

Democracy is better than other forms of government because it allows us to correct our own mistakes: Even if no government can guarantee that no mistakes will be made, in a democracy one can be sure that it will not be hidden for too long. It makes space for public discussion on these mistakes. There is also room for correction. Rulers have to change their decisions, or they could themselves be changed.

Thus, we can correctly infer that while democracy may not be the solution to all problems, it is still clearly better than any other alternatives.

Democracy improves the quality of Decision Making

- Democracy is based on consultations and discussions. People collectively discuss and take decisions.
- This reduces the possibility of taking any irresponsible decision.

Democracy provides a method to deal with differences and conflicts

- Differences are bound to take place in a society where people belonging to various castes, religion and classes live together.
- People belonging to different religions and castes have their own preferences and interests of one group may clash with the other.
- If a powerful group begins to dictate its terms and forces its decisions over the other groups, it may lead to discontentment and resentment among the other people.
- Democracy provides peaceful solution to this problem because decisions which are taken by mutual consent are followed and respected by all.

Democracy allows people to correct their own mistakes

- There are possibilities of taking wrong decisions in a democracy. However, as there is a

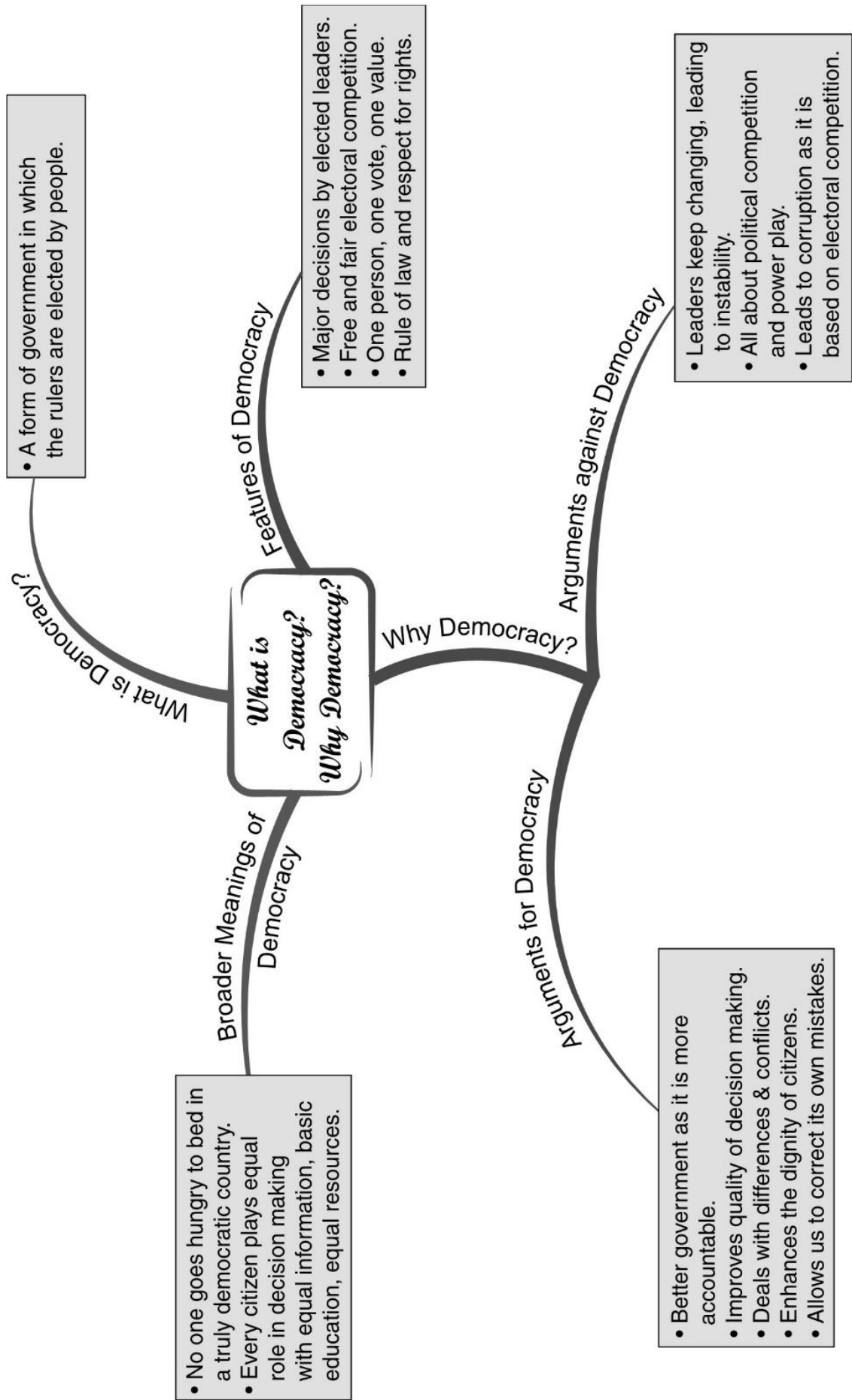
space for public discussions, such mistakes cannot remain hidden from the people for long.

- If the representatives of the people do not change their incorrect decisions, they may not get elected by the people in the next elections.

Currently most of the countries practice a form of democracy in which representatives of the people make laws and take decisions on behalf of the people who voted for them. This is called representative democracy.

We find that no country in the world is a perfect democracy but certainly it is the best form of government.

CHAPTER- 1 WHAT IS DEMOCRACY ? WHY DEMOCRACY ?



Important Questions

Multiple Choice questions-

Question 1. A democracy must be based on a free and fair election where those currently in power:

- (a) Have a fair chance of winning
- (b) Have a fair chance of losing
- (c) Cannot be removed from their seats
- (d) None of the above

Question 2. In Saudi Arabia:

- (a) Men do not have the right to vote
- (b) Women do not have the right to vote
- (c) Both men and women have the right to vote
- (d) Both men and women do not have the right to vote

Question 3. Estonia has made its citizenship rules in such a way that people belonging to:

- (a) African minority find it difficult to get the right to vote
- (b) American minority find it difficult to get the right to vote
- (c) Russian minority find it difficult to get the right to vote
- (d) All the above

Question 4. In Fiji, the electoral system is such that the vote of an indigenous Fiji has more value than that of:

- (a) An African Fijian
- (b) A Chinese Fijian
- (c) An Indian Fijian
- (d) Pakistani-Fijian

Question 5.

In a democracy, each adult citizen must:

- (a) Have one vote and each vote must have two values
- (b) Have two votes and each vote must have one value
- (c) Have one vote and each vote must have one value
- (d) All the above

Question 6. Zimbabwe attained independence from white minority rule in:

- (a) 1960
- (b) 1970
- (c) 1980
- (d) 1990

Question 7. A democratic government rules within limits set by:

- (a) The ruling government
- (b) The constitutional law
- (c) Citizens right
- (d) Constitutional law and citizens' rights

Question 8. Democracy is a form of government in which:

- (a) Rulers elected by the government take all the major decisions
- (b) Elections offer a choice and fair opportunity to the people to change the current rulers
- (c) The exercise of this choice leads to a government limited by basic rules of the constitution and citizen's rights
- (d) All the above

Question 9. The correct argument/s of democracy is/are:

- (a) Leaders keep changing in a democracy. This leads to instability
- (b) Democracy is all about political competition and power play. There is no scope for morality
- (c) So many people have to be consulted in a democracy that it leads to delays
- (d) All the above

Question 10. The worst recorded famine in world history is:

- (a) Bengal famine
- (b) Japanese famine
- (c) China's famine
- (d) American famine

Question 11. A democratic government is a better government because it is a more:

- (a) Effective form of government
- (b) Accountable form of government
- (c) Powerful form of government
- (d) None of the above

Question 12. Democracy improves the:

- (a) Dignity of the people
- (b) Economy of the country
- (c) The quality of decision-making
- (d) All the above

Question 13. Democracy provides a method:

- (a) To build buildings
- (b) To fight poverty
- (c) To deal with differences and conflict
- (d) All the above

Question 14. Democracy is the form of government in which:

- (a) People are elected by the rulers
- (b) Rulers are not elected by the people
- (c) People themselves become rulers
- (d) Rulers are elected by the people

Question 15. In Pakistan, General Parvez Musharraf led a military coup in October:

- (a) 1997
- (b) 1998
- (c) 1999
- (d) 2000

Very Short Questions:

1. To what was Allende's government committed in Chile?
2. To what was Walesa's government committed in Poland?
3. Why do we need a definition?
4. What form of government democracy is?
5. State any one necessary condition of democracy.
6. Do we have election in a monarchy where the king is all-powerful?
7. Does the army regime permit elections where it rules through the gun?
8. From which language the word . democracy has come up?
9. How did Abraham Lincoln define democracy?
10. Does holding of the elections ensure democracy in a country?

Short Questions:

1. Why it is more likely that decisions are wrong in dictatorship than under a democracy?
2. Why perfect equality does not exist in a society?
3. Why are the governments responsive in democracies?
4. Give any one definition of democracy.
5. Why do we need a definition of any concept?
6. Democracy involves people in the formation of the government. How do the people form government?
7. What do you mean by political freedom? How does it help the functioning of democracy?

Long Questions:

1. Explain the following :
 - (i) Freedom of expression
 - (ii) Freedom of information
 - (iii) Freedom to form association?
2. Write on the following:
 - (a) Freedom of culture and religion.
 - (b) Individual freedoms.
3. What do you mean by 'Rule of law'?
4. Can you identify some features necessary for any country to be called democratic?
5. Are elections necessary conditions in a democracy? Give arguments.

Assertion Reason Questions:

1. In the following questions, a statement of Assertion (A) followed by a statement of Reason (R) is given. Choose the correct option out of the choices given below each question.

Assertion (A) : A referendum was held in Pakistan in the year 2002.

Reason (R) : Pervez Musharraf was granted five year extension as President.

- A) Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A
- B) Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A
- C) A is true, but R is false

D) A is false, but R is true

2. In the following questions, a statement of Assertion (A) followed by a statement of Reason (R) is given. Choose the correct option out of the choices given below each question.

Assertion (A) : Pakistan is considered as a democratic country.

Reason (R) : In Pakistan the final powers rested with military officers.

A) Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A

B) Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A

C) A is true, but R is false

D) A is false, but R is true

Case Study Based Question:

1. Read the source and answer the following questions.

In Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf led a military coup in October 1999.

He overthrew a democratically elected government and declared himself the ' Chief Executive' of the country. Later he changed his designation to President and in 2002 held a referendum in the country that granted him a five year extension. Pakistani media, Human Rights Organisations and democracy activists said that the referendum was based on malpractices and fraud.

In August, 2002 he issued a ' Legal Framework Order' that amended the Constitution of Pakistan. According to this order, the President can dismiss the National and Provincial Assemblies. The work of the Civilian Cabinet is supervised by a National Security Council which is dominated by military officers. After passing this law, elections were held to the National and Provincial Assemblies. So, Pakistan has had elections, elected representatives have some powers. But the final power rested with military officers and General Musharraf himself.

(1) Why did Pakistani media and Human Rights Organisation criticise General Pervez Musharraf?

A) Musharraf over threw an elected government and declared himself as the ' Chief Executive' .

B) Musharraf changed his designation to President and held a referendum that granted him a 5 year extension which was based on mal practices and fraud.

C) He was an autocratic ruler.

D) None of the above

(2) Find the incorrect statement from the given options

A) General Musharraf declared himself as the ' Prime Minister' of the country in

1999.

B) In August 2002, General Musharraf amended the Constitution of Pakistan.

C) General Musharraf has the authority to dismiss the National and Provincial Assemblies.

D) General Musharraf imbibed himself with supreme powers.

(3) According to the "Legal Framework Order", the work of the civilian cabinet of Pakistan is supervised by the.....

A) Chief Executive Council Members.

B) Prime Minister.

C) Military Officers of the National Security Council.

D) None of the above.

(4) The power to take final decision in Pakistan rested with

A) Elected representative of National Assemblies.

B) Elected representative of Provincial Assemblies.

C) Army officials and General Musharraf.

D) All of the above.

2. Read the given passage and answer the following questions.

Zimbabwe attained independence from White minority rule in 1980. Since then the country has been ruled by ZANU-PF, the party that led the freedom struggle. Its leader, Robert Mugabe, ruled the country since independence.

Elections were held regularly and always won by ZANU-PF. President Mugabe was popular but also used unfair practices in elections. Over the years his government changed the constitution several times to increase the powers of the President and make him less accountable.

Opposition party workers were harassed and their meeting disrupted. Public protests and demonstrations against the government were declared illegal. There was a law that limited the right to criticise the President.

Television and radio were controlled by the government and gave only the ruling party's version. There were independent newspapers but the government harassed those journalists who went against it.

The government ignored some court judgments that went against it and pressurized judges. He was forced out of office in 2017.

(1) Which of the following statement is/ are correct in the case of Zimbabwe?.

A) Popular governments are always democratic.

B) Popular governments can be undemocratic.

- C) Popular leaders can be autocratic.
 - D) Both (a) and (c).
- (2) What kind of oppressive practices were adopted under the rule of Mugabe?
- A) Public protests and demonstrations against the government were declared illegal.
 - B) Opposition party workers were harassed and their meeting disrupted.
 - C) There was a law that limited the right to criticise the President.
 - D) All of the above.
- (3) Which of the following statement is incorrect?
- A) Democracy also lead to instability.
 - B) A democratic government rules within limits set by constitutional law and citizens rights.
 - C) A democratic government cannot do. whatever it likes, simply because it has won an election.
 - D) In democracy, rulers elected by the people cannot take all the major decisions.
- (4) Which of the following facts are correct with respect to Robert Mugabe?
- A) He always followed a pragmatic approach to benefit the common people.
 - B) He always intended to convert Zimbabwe from a parliamentary democracy into a one-party socialist state.
 - C) He was an autocratic leader.
 - D) Both (a) and (c).

Answer Key:

MCQ

1. (b) Have a fair chance of losing
2. (b) Women do not have the right to vote
3. (c) Russian minority find it difficult to get the right to vote
4. (c) An Indian-Fijian
5. (c) Have one vote and each vote must have one value
6. (c) 1980
7. (d) Constitutional law and citizens' rights
8. (d) All the above
9. (d) All the above
- 10.(c) China's famine

- 11.(b) Accountable form of government
- 12.(c) The quality of decision-making
- 13.(c) To deal with differences and conflict
- 14.(d) Rulers are elected by the people
- 15.(c) 1999

Very Short Answer:

- 1. Allende's government was committed to greater role in economic activities.
- 2. Walesa's government was committed to as little role as was possible.
- 3. We need a definition when we counter a difficulty in everyday use.
- 4. Democracy is a form of government in which the rulers are elected by the people.
- 5. Election is the necessary condition of democracy.
- 6. There can be no election in a monarchy headed by a real powerful king.
- 7. Normally not. The army general may allow election only to legitimate his rule.
- 8. Etymologically, democracy is derived from two Greek words 'demos' and 'Kratia'. 'Demos' means people and 'Kratia' means rule. Thus, etymologically, democracy means the rule of the people.
- 9. Democracy, Lincoln had said, is government of the people, by the people and for the people.
- 10. Certainly not. Salazar allowed elections in Portugal once for a while. But there was never a time when the opposition parties won a single seat.

Short Answer:

Ans: 1. Under dictatorship (monarchy or military rule), the rulers do not involve people at all in decision-making. That is why that the decisions there are likely to be wrong.

Ans: 2. Perfect equality does not exist in any society because of inequalities, among people, in wealth, social status, and position. In fact, perfect inequality is never possible.

Ans: 3. As the elected representatives, in a democracy, has to secure the support of the people, they cannot afford to be insensitive to the aspirations of the people.

Ans: 4. Abraham Lincoln defines democracy as the government of the people (i.e, through participation people constitute the government) by the people (i.e. the people, through the use of their rights, control, their rulers), for the people, (i.e. the government rules for the welfare of the people).

Ans: 5. We need a definition of a concept so as to understand the meaning of the concept. Definition clarifies the meaning. For example, the definition of democracy, etymologically, means, that it is the rule of the people.

Ans: 6. Democracy, indeed, means government of the people. People form government

through elections. Periodic elections are conditions of democracy.

Elections have to be

- frequent (i.e. after definite periods),
- free and, fair
- In the absence of elections, democracy is impossible; it can not function successfully.

Ans: 7. Political freedom means freedom given to the people in matter relating to democratic functioning of the government. Political freedom implies right of the people to have their opinions, their right to express those, opinions, and demonstrate their political actions in the form of procession. When people are not permitted to express their opinion, this weakens democratic trends/tendencies, The house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi does not fit in democratic functioning.

Long Answer:

Ans: 1. (i) Freedom of expression: Citizens have freedom of opinion, expression and discussion. They can criticize officials, government or the socio-economic order. They can also organize meetings, campaign on public issues or demonstrate against government.

(ii) Freedom of information: Citizens have access to information about candidates in elections. They can seek information from different sources. Government cannot have monopoly on sources of information. Laws shall protect alternative sources of information.

(iii) Right to form associations: Citizens have a right to form, join or quit associations. It includes a right to form or join a political party that opposes government or to contest elections in opposition to the ruling party. Opposition shall have an equal opportunity to increase popular support or gain power through elections.

Ans: 2. (a) Freedom of culture and religion: People have freedom of faith, belief and religion. Those who belong to ethnic minorities have the right to follow their cultural practices. Linguistic minorities can speak their language. Religious minorities can freely follow and profess their religion. Persons who belong to minorities enjoy rights available to any other citizen of the country.

(b) Individual freedoms: State does not impose restrictions on travel, choice of residence, and choice of employment. Citizens have an equal right to seek admission in colleges or recruitment to jobs. They can acquire or sell property. They can establish private businesses. They can read any book of their choice. Government does not impose ban on the discussion of ideas.

Ans: 3. All citizens are treated as equal under the law. Law protects citizens from unjustified detention. Military and police are under the control of elected representatives. Military and police cannot terrorize or torture those who oppose government. Independent courts effectively protect individual and group rights.

Decisions of courts are respected and enforced by those in government.

Ans: 4. There are, indeed, certain features which are necessary for any country to be called as democratic. Some of these are:

- There should be rights for the citizens, not nominal but actually available.
- The Constitution of the country should not only provide these rights, it should also ensure them.
- The Constitution should also provide democratic institutions and procedures as well.

Ans: 5. Elections, indeed, are necessary conditions for any democracy. In fact, elections alone distinguish between a democracy and non-democracy. In a non-democracy, such as in military rule or in a nonparty, there are no elections. If there are elections, they are not frequent, nor fair, and nor even free. Salazar of Portugal did allow one month of campaign but there was little possibility of opposition leaders winning the elections.

Elections are necessary, but if the power is not given to those who win elections, there cannot be democracy in such countries. Aung San Suu Kyi won elections in Burma (now Myanmar) in 1990, but she was not given power, instead, she was put under house arrest.

Elections imply the existence of more than one political party so to enable them to contest elections. In China, only the ruling political party can put up candidates, two or more. How can we call such a system as a democratic one? Democracy requires elections free, fair and frequent; elections where people are able to remove those elected and install new leaders in power.

Assertion Reason Answer:

1. A) Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A
2. D) A is false, but R is true

Case Study Answer:

1. Answer:

- (1) B) Musharraf changed his designation to President and held a referendum that granted him a 5 year extension which was based on mal practices and fraud.
- (2) A) General Musharraf declared himself as the 'Prime Minister' of the country in 1999.
- (3) C) Military Officers of the National Security Council
- (4) C) Army officials and General Musharraf

2. Answer:

- (1) D) Both (a) and (c)
- (2) D) All of the above

(3) D) In democracy, rulers elected by the people cannot take all the major decisions.

(4) D) Both (a) and (c)