

Q)Discuss the growth and development of democracy.

Ans: Democracy is a western idea which has evolved over time considerably. It has a long tradition. But the notions regarding its essence and grounds of its justification have been revived from time to time. The term appeared in the 5th century BC to denote the political systems then existing in ancient Greek city-states, notably Classical Athens. The idea of consensus seeking during this ancient period then broadened to include the masses, and this is how democracy came into being.

Growth and development of democracy:

1)Ancient Greece: The origin of the concept democracy can be traced back to ancient Greece. It was first used in the 5th century BC by the Greek historian Herodotus in the sense of 'rule by the people'. The word is derived from two Greek words 'demos' meaning 'the people' or 'the many' and 'kratos' which means 'power' or 'rule'. The Greek city-states experimented with direct democracy. Under direct democracy, all the

freemen met together in general assemblies, discussed and voted on major public issues. Officials were selected by lot, but slaves, foreign residents and women were excluded from the right to vote. Both Plato and Aristotle condemned democracy. Although Aristotle was more sympathetic towards democracy but he believed it to be a corrupt form of government.

Despite the great achievements of the Athenian city-state, the idea of democracy was not widely praised in the Ancient World.

2)The Roman period: During the period of ancient Roman empire, the Romans drawing inspiration from the Greek civilization, set up their first assembly named ***Comitia Curiata***. It was the first step towards a democratic polity. Different tribes were represented in the assembly and they elected their magistrates. This assembly was later on named **Comitia Centuriata**. However, the assembly was restricted to free male citizens, the wealthy and soldiers. The majority of the citizens did not have a say in government matters and so the democratic system got weakened.

3)Democracy in the Middle Ages:

The middle ages were a period of European history beginning from the fall of the Roman Empire(476 AD) until the fall of Constantinople in 1453 AD.It is also known as the Dark Ages.The middle ages had no conception of democracy.There was the dominance of faith over politics and Christianity was widely followed.It was only during the late Middle Ages that the ideas of democracy came to be accepted. Feudalism was another form of government prevalent at that time. It stressed that all people had certain rights and developed a system of courts to defend these rights.

From Middle Ages to Modernism(15th and 16th centuries)

During the 15th and 16th centuries ,there took place the Renaissance or Enlightenment which brought about a lot of change in Europe. There was the revival of the learning of ancient Greece and Rome,rediscovery of knowledge,reading of ancient texts as well as the works of great philosophers.The Protestant movement led by Martin Luther king also helped directly or indirectly in the development of democracy.

Adoption of Magna Carta:

The Magna Carta or the “Great Charter” was a landmark document that gave certain rights to the English people. King John of England agreed to it on June 15, 1215. It established the idea of consultative government, an idea that is central to modern democracy. It set precedence to democratic government ideas such as citizens’ right to vote, representation in government and property ownership. It also established the principle that everyone including the king was subject to the law.

4) America:

The American Revolution of 1776, which began as a movement against British rule of the American colonies, also had a strong element of democratic idealism. The British kingdom had established colonies on American soil and also imposed heavy taxes upon them. The Americans strongly opposed it with the slogan, “no taxation without representation”. This led to the creation of the American Declaration of Independence written by the American President, Thomas Jefferson in 1776. In this declaration, ideas of liberty and equality were included that formed the essence of democracy.

5) France:

The French Revolution of 1789, was the first successful attempt by an European nation to establish a government by the people. French revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity not only affected France but also whole of Europe. Democratic ideas spread throughout Europe in the Napoleonic era (1799-1815 AD). The July Revolution of 1830 and the French Revolution of 1848 in France led to revolts and revolutions in other parts of Europe and paved way for constitutional government.

The Industrial Revolution of 1688 also contributed to the evolution of democracy. In Europe, this revolution created a middle class, which as it became stronger, struggled and also achieved their right to vote. They demanded political participation through interest groups and labour unions.

Democracy progressed slowly and gradually and in most parts of Europe universal suffrage was given to large sections of the working class and even to women. The suffragette movement was launched by women to gain equality and right to vote.

The First World War broke out in 1914 and continued till 1918, many new states emerged in Eastern Europe and the Baltic region. All of these were committed to democracy, but in different degrees.

But after the Great Economic Depression of 1929 in Europe, fascism became widespread. In 1933, Adolf Hitler led the Nazi party to power in Germany and fascism was established after a few years in Japan and Spain. The aggressiveness and expansionism of the fascist regime led to the Second World War from 1939-1945. The collapse of Soviet Communism in 1991 discouraged democratic movements in different parts of the world. After the Second World War, circumstances forced Britain, France and other European powers to give independence to their colonies in Asia and Africa. Democracy was adopted in most of these countries. The present day type of democracy is the indirect or representative democracy, although direct democracy still exist in some cantons of Switzerland.