Democracy, which literally means rule of the people, is an ideal, which has been understood in different ways in different periods of history. No definition of democracy can adequately comprise the vast history, which the concept connotes. To some it is a form of government, to others a way of social life. Men have found its essence in the character of the electorate, the relation between government and the people, the absence of the wide economic differences between individuals, the refusal to recognize privileges built on birth or wealth, race or creed. Inevitably it has changed its substance in terms of time and place. What has seemed democracy to a member of some ruling class has seemed to his poorer fellow citizen a narrow and defensible oligarchy. Democracy has a context in every sphere of life; and in each of these spheres it raises its special problems, which do not admit of satisfactory or universal generalization.

The struggle for the attainment of democratic institutions has taken forms as various as the conditions it encountered. The eighteenth century popularized three ideas. English experience led to the belief that parliamentary government is the parent of civil liberty. The American Revolution made popular the notion that a discontented people has the right to cashier its governors. The French Revolution established the principle that autocracy is the necessary parent of special privilege. Nineteenth century democrats attempted to find institutional expression for these ideas. And the stress of a new and intensified system of production, in which rapidly
increasing and concentrated populations had to be satisfied, necessarily increased the rate of progress towards democratic institutions.

Due to the acceptability and popularity of democracy, the advocates and practitioners of different forms of government claim legitimacy of their own models by projecting them as democratic ones even if their political machines adopt principles and practices which are basically opposed to democratic tenets because they believe that any government which uses power for the welfare of the common masses, must be regarded as democracy. The more "democracy" has come to be a universally accepted term, the more it has undergone verbal stretching and has become the finest label of its kind. Not every communist system claims to be a socialist system, but even communist systems of many countries claim to be democracies. Each nation claims that its own form of democracy is the true democracy. Thus, there is a lot of confusion and ambiguity with regard to the word democracy. It has been stated that, "Democracy is the most valued and also perhaps the vaguest of political concepts in the modern world."1

Since World War II, "democracy" encompasses every thing; as stated by a UNESCO report “…for the first time in the history of the world…practice politicians and political theorists agree in stressing the democratic element in the institutions they depend and in the theories they advocated.”2

Literally, the term democracy indicates both a set of ideals and a political system.3 Democracy as an ideal is, a society not of similar persons

of equals, in the sense that each is an integral irreplaceable part of the whole. As a political system, it implies the responsible government, that is to say, the government is answerable to the people.

Real democracy is nevertheless, a recognizable, specific form of government and manner of living. When a person lives in a genuine democracy; he knows it, feels it and even breathes it. According to Dewey, “The foundation of democracy is faith in the capacities of human nature; faith in human intelligence and in the power of pooled and cooperative experience.”

Like all living things it is evolving and growing. That is why it is difficult to define. To meet new situations, it may change its form and eternal structure but its essential characteristics and principles remain unchanged. It is a process, rather than a state of being; a continuous journey towards ever growing goals.

**SCOPE AND MEANING**

According to the **Normative Approach**, the definition of democracy strictly derives from the literal meaning of the term “power of the people.” There are three different normative approaches: oppositional, realistic and perfectionalist. Used as oppositional concept, democracy indicates what ought not to be; realistic normativism points to what could be; while utopian normativism presents the image of the perfect society that must be.

The **Descriptive Approach** is concerned with what democracy is in the real world. For example, Dahl says that in actuality democracies are

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6 Ibid.
“poliarchies”. Most of the authors describe democracy as a system based on competitive parties, concepts of representation, majority rule, opposition, competition, alternative government, control etc.

Democracy is one type of political system among others, and from this viewpoint the problem becomes to define the properties that distinguish it from non-democratic polities. When the issue arises, the attempt is often made to qualify democracy with reference to ‘an ought’ rather than to ‘is’ according to typological approach.

Democracy is two-dimensional from the dimensional standpoint i.e. Microdimensional and Macrodimensional. Microdemocracy applies to face-to-face relationships i.e. to small groups. Macrodemocracy applies whenever there is large collectivity and face-to-face relationships is not possible.

Democracy means political power in the hands of the people. It is opposed to the rule by a few even if the few is very capable. Democracy only takes on a more useful meaning when qualified by one or the other word with which it is associated, for example liberal democracy, representative democracy, participatory democracy or direct democracy. Broadly, democracy can be defined as a form of government which accepts the paramountcy of the people over whom it is supposed to rule. To have a clear understanding of democracy it is necessary to adopt a more rational approach to study, analyse this form of government as practiced in different

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9 Ibid.
10 Robertson, David, Dictionary of Politics (Second Edition), op. cit., p. 129.
countries and the different forms of democracy as stated by statesman and thinkers.

Democracy had been used as a political concept for a long time but with the changing period of time different writers popularized this term differently.

Tocqueville called democracy as “Social democracy”11. It means equal treatment and equal respect for everyman. Tocqueville’s ‘Democracy in America’ is more concerned with social and economic equality and their political implications than with democracy narrowly conceived of as a purely political system. He regards “equality to be the chief characteristic of a democracy.”12 Infact, he argues that equality will lead to freedom. Social democracy is one in which the mass of the people play an active rather than a passive role and in which the old traditions of difference and subordination have been replaced by a sense of equality among the people - the feeling that one man or even one person, is as good as another, or at least has an equal right to be respected and listened to. Thus, there is inevitably a link between democracy and equality.

Marxism popularized the expression “economic democracy”13. The primary goal of economic democracy is the redistribution of wealth and equalization of economic opportunities. In the Marxist approach political democracy has no value in itself, for it is only a superstructure of bourgeois and capitalistic oppression.

Webb of guild socialism called it “industrial democracy”.14 It is a democracy within industrial plants. It calls for self-government by the

11 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
workers in a plant a direct self-government, which could or should be crowned at the national level by a “functional democracy”. It is true that social democracy is vital basis of a democratic polity, economic equalization and industrial democracy are valuable goals but these democracies are not sovereign, they presuppose, explicitly or implicitly, a political democracy.  

Democracy consists in “government by the people” or “popular self-government.” There remains disagreement about the conditions under which people can properly be said to rule itself. The usual paradigm of a people governing itself is the direct democracy of ancient Athens. Citizenship was a hereditary privilege, excluding Slaves and metics. Athenian people governed themselves in the sense that every individual could participate personally in policy decisions by discussion and voting in a face-to-face solution. Athenian procedures are held to have been democratic in the sense that everyone was supposed to have an equal opportunity to state a case or influence decisions, even if, in some cases, individuals had ultimately to accept decisions that they had previously resisted. In direct democracy if there is disagreement among people and a decision is essential, then it must be arrived at majority vote.

However, direct democracy, practically may not be possible today yet the principles can be engrafted on representative government along the line of direct methods such as Referendum, Initiative, Plebiscite and Recall. C. J. Fredrich rightly points out, “In modern countries the public cannot of course, foregather in the market place like Athenian citizens of old. Hence, the only possible method of securing adequate controls is some scheme by

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15 Ibid., p. 114.
which small selected group of citizens acts for the whole body. Such action is representative.”

Obviously, the conditions of face-to-face democracy, with direct participation cannot be fulfilled within the political structure of modern state, both because of the specialized size of their populations and because of the specialized knowledge needed to govern them. Modern democracy, therefore, is based on representation; it presupposes not direct exercise of power but delegation of power. It is not a system of self-government but a system of control and limitation of self-government. Accordingly, democracy now has become a representative government, i.e. government by persons whom the people elect and thereby authorize to govern them. Political representation means representation of interests; democratic representative is usually thought to have the duty to watch over either the interests of his constituents, or as a member of an assembly representing the whole people, the interests of the people at large.

But Rajni Kothari holds the different view. He says, “As for the inapplicability of the ideal of direct democracy to the largeness and complexity of modern life, the point is wholly invalid. It is precisely because life has become so complex and the communications between the individual and the institutions that affect him in diverse way so remote that the need for individual participation in the decision making process - which is the crux of the idea of direct democracy-becomes all the more potent.

The concept of democracy did not spring suddenly and miraculously

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into fully formed being. Moreover, its growth has been long and slow and its origin goes back to the dawn of human civilizations. Since the days of Neolithic man, when men began to raise domesticated animals and cultivated crops the need of Mutual Cooperation has been felt, the need to regulate relationship by law and to establish a stable society with defined duties among its members. Hence, any study of what democracy is, any attempt to discover its essence or meaning, must necessary be an historical study.

It is quite interesting to mention here that in ancient times kings and rulers had arbitrary and absolute powers. The authority of the ruler was not at first limited by any set of rules or by any written law defining the rights of his subjects. Slowly, men grouped and struggled towards some guaranteed limitation of the King’s arbitrary authority.

In the Sumerian city-states of Mesopotamia in West Asia several thousand years before the Christian era, uniform laws were codified and written on clay tablets. Centuries later in old Babylon, King Hammurbai drew up a code of laws, which set forth the rights of his subjects in fairly specific terms. Likewise, the Kings of the Hebrew in Palestine had a bond or a covenant with their people which obliged them to rule with justice.

The Greeks coined the word “democracy” from two Greek words – demos, meaning people and kratos, meaning power, thus implying democracy as power of the people. They also gave some of the first known examples of direct democracy, that is, a government in which all the citizens assembled together to elect officials, try criminals and determine their foreign policy.20

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In ancient Greece, direct democracy was possible because the political unit was the city-state, not a whole nation. The way had been prepared in the previous century by Solon. He established laws under which rich and poor received equal treatment, set up courts of laws in which the jury was chosen by a lot from among all the citizens, and granted more citizens participation in the popular assembly and the right to hold office. To quote De Tocqueville, “The progress of democracy seems irresistible, because it is the most uniform, the most ancient and the most permanent tendency which is to be found in history.”

Another statesman of Greece, Pericles widened the base of democracy by extending the right to take part in the assemblies to all free citizens over eighteen and by providing remuneration for citizens who served as officials or juniors. Athenian democracy had defects, which were removed by Plato, one of the greatest of Greek thinkers. Recognizing that many of the citizens were ignorant and untrained in the art of government, he preferred a government by an elite group of philosophers. Another famous Greek philosopher, Aristotle saw the positive virtues of democracy. Even though the people were untrained, he said, they could decide whether a government was good or bad for them and could elect their officials accordingly. Furthermore, the body of citizens had an innate common sense and common decency, which in the free and open discussion of a democracy would be likely to reject wrong plans and ideas.

Aristotle classifies governments, refers to the characteristic of each and gives his preference to polity or moderate democracy in which the middle class exercises the greatest influence. He approves neither

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21 Tocqueville, All reis De, Democracy in America, op. cit., p. 22-23.
oligarchy (government by a few powerful people) nor that form of
democracy in which government is in the hands of only the poor. In polity
on the other hand, the middle class will in his view, treat equally the rich
and the poor, and being trusted by both, will be able to set up a firm and
safe-government.

A latter group of Greek philosophers, the Stoics, contributed
generously to the expanding theory of democracy. The Stoics believed that
man by his nature has individual responsibility and freedom as well the duty
to obey the law. Furthermore, all men are members of a divine society and,
as such, have the obligation to contribute to one another's good.

The Stoics philosophy later passed to Rome and flourished there.
From it Roman law, which was to be such a powerful factor in the
development of western democracy, derived the fundamental principles of a
natural law, which transcends the boundaries of states and nations. The
Roman orator, Cicero said, "There will be one law, external and
unchangeable, binding at all times upon all people and there will be, as it
were, one common master and ruler of men, namely God, who is the author
of this law, its interpreter and sponsor." Cicero further believed that "no
state except one in which the people have supreme power provides a
habitation for liberty."23

Perhaps Rome’s greatest legacy to the development of free
institutions in many parts of the world was her system of laws. The Roman’s
extensive experience with the administration of justice and the protection of
men’s rights was thus made available to the peoples of the Western World
who wished to build a democratic society based on the rule of law.

In the dark ages of Europe the historic document of “Magna Carta” came into existence in England. This “Great Charter of demands” established two far reaching precedents: First, that the power of a ruler is limited; and second, that human rights are more important than the sovereignty of Kings. Since the Magna Carta and the formation of the first parliament, England has developed her practice of political and social democracy. The “Glorious Revolution” of 1688 was milestone in progress of the people’s rights. The philosopher whose name is always associated with the 1688-89 settlement in England is John Locke. After Aristotle, it was not until the 17th Century that any important ideas were evolved on the subject of democracy. And the most well known political thinker of this period was John Locke, who presented his concept of democracy in his “Two Treatises of Government”. Locke classifies governments into democracy (government by the people), oligarchy (government by a few powerful persons) and Monarchy (government by a King) and gives his preference to democracy. He insists that all the governments run according to rulers depending on the consent or agreement of the governed and that no government can have a right to obedience from a people who have not consented to it. He wants a system in which the King has no right to make laws and is appointed by the consent of the people. The basis of his theory is that sovereign or supreme authority does not belong to any individual but to the people as a whole.  

Along with the British growth of individual liberty during the centuries people began to cherish a sense of civic responsibility. The twentieth century in Great Britain has been marked by an increasing concern of social justice and democracy, which has been translated into laws and

measures to assure the well being of the whole population regardless of class.

The practices of democratic living so deeply established in Great Britain have had their influence in many countries. England’s contribution to the respect of individual rights and her devising of the practical mechanics of democratic law and government prevalent in many parts of the world cannot be overestimated.

During the nineteenth century, the structure of political and social democracy began to take broader form in most parts of Europe. Constitutional monarchies, with increasing power granted to the people were established in Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, the Scandavian countries and in other nations also.

Switzerland is one of the oldest democracies. Starting in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as a confederation of small units or contents, speaking different languages. Switzerland early developed a fierce spirit of independence and freedom. Today, inspite of differences in religion, customs and language among its citizens, it represents a remarkable example of fully developed democracy proud of its religious tolerance, freedom of the press, equality before the law, advanced social legislation and a stable balance between local autonomy and federal power.

Direct democracy of Switzerland is very much influenced by the views of Rousseau on “Direct Democracy”. Rousseau’s contribution to the spread of democratic ideas is commendable. In his “Social Contract”, he lays down that the people are not only the ultimate sources of all authority, but in a sense, the government. He holds that the people cannot even if

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they wish; give up their sovereignty or supremacy within state. This sovereignty exists in the general will of the people and every individual helps in its formation. The general will of the community is thus the real will of all the members of community. It possesses the qualities of unity, permanence and complete freedom from the possibility of wrong. The Doctrine of “General Will” is the most significant contribution of Rousseau to democratic thought.

American democracy came into existence with the establishment of “Mayflower Compact” in 1620. Through the Mayflower Compact the colonists brought with them certain ideals of religious freedom and local self-government, which later shaped to the American democracy. The colonists signed an agreement in which they promised to “combine ourselves together into a Civil Body Politick" to frame such just and equal laws…as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general Good of the Colony.”26 This was America’s first written statement of, self-government and expressed for the first time in the New World the concepts of individual responsibility and unity through working together.

Gradually their local institutions of self-government flourished. Consequently, the Congress adopted the “Declaration of independence” in 1776 in which it set forth its political doctrine, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”27

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27. Ibid.
Thus for the first time in history, a State was founded squarely and without reservations on democratic idealism, on the sovereignty of the people. The American Constitution, which came into existence in 1789, is an eminently practical document and shows that its framers were fully awake of man's frailties, as well as of his potentiality for progress.

However, one very influential form of the belief in the equal rights or worth of each person was found in Utilitarianism, which in its democratic version attached equal weight to the happiness and suffering of each individual. Bentham advocated the principle of political democracy. He saw that the people were capable of acting politically for themselves and therefore he suggested that each person would vote in his own interest. The sum total of individual votes ought therefore to promote the utilitarian objective of the greatest happiness of greatest number. The only people who could be trusted to pursue the good of the people were the people themselves acting through their elected and accountable representatives.

In 1820s John Stuart Mill moved away from the British Utilitarianism of Bentham and James Mill. He said, “I ceased to consider representative democracy as an absolute principle.” He thinks that the only government which can fully satisfy all the pressing necessities of the social state is one in which the whole people take part. Mill regards democracy as the best form of government but he is also aware of danger to which it is subject. Accordingly, it seems that Mill feared in democracy was less the type of government it might produce than the dominance, within society, of what he

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saw as a monolithic body of mediocre public opinion which would be intolerant of dissent or even mere eccentricity. This was the chief preoccupation of his “On Liberty” (1859). He said, “Those groups who make up what is called public opinion are always a collective mediocrity.”

He thus gave the idea that the educated should be given more votes than the mass of the people. This, he believed, would provide a safeguard against the ignorance, selfishness and brutality, which he so feared in the mass of the people. His main concern was to reconcile the general principle of democracy with the idea of government and social leadership being safely in the hands of elite of the best and the most enlightened members of society. Government should be elected by popular vote, but once elected, the people should accept that an assembly of the best and wisest men in the nation would make better decisions than the people themselves.

It was only in the twentieth century that theorists attempted to produce a version of democracy in which popular participation was treated with suspicion. Therefore, this represents as fundamental departure from the traditional understanding of what democracy was.

The classical elite theorists like Pareto, Mosca and Michles made an attempt to limit the role of ‘the masses’ within the political system. The core of elite theory was the contention that democracy, in the strict traditional sense of rule by the people is, impossible: all government is government by an elite.

According to these Sociologists there is always behind the democratic facade, an oligarchy, even though its members take turns at playing the key governing role. According to them even in the present times every government is oligarchy in which power and influence is shared only by

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32 Arblaster, Anthony, Democracy, op. cit., p. 49.
some leaders or a ruling elite. Every political organization demands that the political power should vest in the minority (elite) rather than the majority (people). Every political system is divided into the governors and the governed, and the governors are always a minority class (elite) who exclusively share power and influence. Wherever there is a government, political organization are governors. political authority will vest in the political elite because only they provide the leadership. They do not accept the concept of political equality as the governors and governed can never be equal. The governors, inspite of their declarations of being servants of the people, are superior to the governed.

The most influential modern elitist theory of democracy was given by Joseph Schumpeter in his book “Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy” (1942). He said that the traditional theory of democracy did not allow for a proper recognition of the vital fact of leadership. He concluded that the proper role of the people was to choose their rulers through competitive elections and then leave them to get on with the business of governing. The voters must understand, “Democracy does not mean and cannot mean that the people actually rule in any obvious sense of terms ‘people’ and ‘rule’. Democracy means only that the people have opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them….by free competition among would be leaders for the vote of the electorate.”

There is another view which sees democracy as a way of safeguarding and reconciling individual and group interests. Pluralistic accounts of democracy means - to be democratic, policy making agencies must be sensitive to a wide range of pressures so that no interest significantly affected

by a decision will be left out of accounts. Democracy, according to this view, requires the dispersal, not the concentration of power. The people are not homogeneous, but a highly diversified complex of interest groups with criss-cross membership. Where there is a wide range of interests, no party aiming at majority support can uphold a minority interest and democracy will tend to give way to majority tyranny.\textsuperscript{36}

Another view of democracy is expressed by Delisle Burns. He says that there should be democracy in every form of social life, in religion, in industry and in politics. In a democracy there should be such an intimate connection between the machinery of government and the life of the men and women of the group that the state may be said to be the people in their corporate capacity.\textsuperscript{37}

The twentieth century, and especially the period since World War - II, has been a time when the ideals of democracy and independence have spread the world over. Scores of former colonies are now independent forging their own democratic forms.

It is fruitful to describe some of the basic beliefs of democracy: they are concepts without which the external forms would wither away.

Some basic concepts are:

- Dignity
- Fraternity and Duty
- Equality
- Freedom
- Participation and Responsibility

**Dignity:** One of the most important basic principles of democracy is a full recognition of the dignity and worth of the individual. In a democracy, each

\textsuperscript{37} Delisle, Burns C., Political Ideals (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), pp. 276-283.
person is important as an individual, his well-being is vital in itself.\textsuperscript{38} Human life, according to democratic principles is a precious far more significant than the impersonal State. Besides, in a true democracy, money, machines and systems are important only as they contribute to man’s welfare. Democracy means faith in the common man and seeks to give assurance to all people inhabiting the state that all have equal opportunity to achieve their goals as they came to envisage them, and to provide positive means for this purpose. A genuine democracy is an active, growing, progressive force responsive to the will of the people and animated by the ideals of mutual service and public welfare.

**Fraternity and Duty:** Infact, democracy involves fellowship, i.e., the feeling of fraternity or consciousness of kind. Fellow feeling aims at the realization of the common-end-the welfare of humanity. Democracy does not recognize class distinctions. Fellowship knows no limit created by religion, cast, birth, or wealth. It is only in a society of equals that harmony can be secured. By equality, we mean, equality of opportunity. This kind of equality ensures social justice, which is the very life-breath of democracy.

A duty is an obligation. A man is said to have a duty in any matter when he is under an obligation to do or not to do something. It is something we owe to others as social beings. When we live together we must let others live with us. This implies certain dos’s and don’ts. My right of living involves my duty to my fellow men to allow them the same condition of life. What is right in regard to one’s self is a duty in regard to others. They are two aspects of the same thing or two sides of the same coin. If one looks at them from one’s own point, they are rights. If one looks at them from the standpoint of others, they are duties.

\textsuperscript{38} Reid, T. John, Democracy in American Civilization, Series No. 4, op. cit., p. 6.
Duty to one's best self, to one's family, to one's village, to one's country, and to the community of nations is one of the democratic concepts. In a democracy the citizen have a sense of moral obligation to cooperate with each other to achieve social and economic justice. Jawaharlal Nehru had said that the law of life should be competition or acquisitiveness but cooperation, the good of each contributing to the good of all. In such a society the emphasis would, certainly, be on duties, not on the rights as the rights would follow the performance of the duties. 

**Equality:** Democracy requires that the basic equality of men is more important than their differences. In a democratic society, equality means equality of opportunity and equality before law. Equality involves first of all the absence of legal discrimination against any one - individual, group, class or race. Secondly, equality claims to provide adequate opportunities for all, recognizing the fact that there can be no difference inherent in nature between claims of men to happiness and especially, that no one person or group may be sacrificed to another.

While referring to the authors of the American Declaration of independence, Abraham Lincoln said "They did not intend to declare all men equal in all respects. They did not mean to say all were equal in colour, size, intellect, moral development or social capacity. They defined with tolerable distinctness in what respects they did consider all men created equal - equal with 'Certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' This they said and this they meant." It means the inequalities created by nature – beauty, ugliness, good health and bad health - cannot be removed, but only their discriminatory effects can be minimized.

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39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., p. 8.
41. Ibid., pp. 7-8.
Equality has various dimensions: Legal, political, social and economic.

**Legal Equality:** It means equality before the law and equal protection of law, i.e., every citizen is subject to the ordinary law of the land and has to stand trial in the same law courts irrespective of his status or position in society.

In a democracy, the citizens live not under the rule of a few men, but under the rule of laws made by the people, binding on all equally. Rule of Law means there is supremacy of law. There should be nothing, which may be characterized as an arbitrary power, and every action of government must be authorized by law. It is the product of centuries of struggle of the people for the recognition of their inherent rights. It ensures liberty and security to all individuals alike and is therefore, antithetic to arbitrariness, and discrimination of any kind. Democracy subsists where Rule of Law prevails. No person or small group or persons can make the laws or act with irresponsible disregard for the law. Dictatorships can and often do make decisions with little regard to popular desires or human dignity. In a democracy the people make laws for the protection of individuals in a mutual society of brothers.

Accordingly, there should be the supremacy of law and no one may be punished except for definite breach of law, which must be proved in a duty constituted court of law. Law should neither be arbitrary nor should it guarantee privilege or take account of privilege. Rich and poor, high and low must be equal before the law.

**Political Equality:** It means that all citizens have the same

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42 Ibid., p. 9.
political rights and equal voice in government, and an equal access to all offices of authority, provided one possesses the necessary qualifications and requirements. This implies democracy and adult suffrage.

**Social Equality:** Social equality means that all citizens are equally tangible units of society and no one is entitled to special privileges. All have equal opportunities to stand up and develop their personality. It implies no distinction in the social status of the people, because of differences in race, colour, sex, class or caste, i.e., there exists no unnecessary social restraint which retards the growth of an individual and realisation of his ambition of a good and happy life.

**Economic Equality:** Economic equality is the fountain head of all the other equalities in a society. It involves sufficiency for all to satisfy their primary or basic needs.

**Freedom:** Another basic tenet of democracy is freedom. In a democratic state the citizens believe that all persons should have maximum freedom for the development of their personality according to their abilities and desires.43 Freedom does not mean the removal or absence of restraints. It is limited both by the obligations of one citizen to another and by the capacities of the individual to use his freedom for self-development and the common good.

In contrast to dictatorial forms of government, democratic freedom means that a man cannot be the property of his government or of any ruling clique. Within the limits imposed by the general welfare, his basic rights must be protected by law and commonly accepted custom. The freedom exists and thrives in a democratic state and the citizens of a

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43 Ibid., p. 8.
democratic state are thinking human beings fully conscious of their rights and duties. A citizen of democratic country makes an equal contribution towards the discovery of the best techniques of democratic government.

**Participation and Responsibility:** Democracy is a human, moral and non-mechanical creation. It can only function when the men and women who live in it are conscious of their responsibilities. In the purely political sphere, democracy can exist only if all citizens contribute to the healthy variety necessary for democratic growth.\(^4\) Democracy thrives on varied and articulate opinion. Aside from the essential act of voting freely and thoughtfully, the citizen has the responsibility of participating actively in his democracy in a variety of ways. He can, for example, take part in forums on public policy, belong to neighbourhood political club, write letters to his representatives in Parliament or Legislature, act as a member of local political bodies, or protest to the legislature through organized “pressure groups”.

“Participation in a democracy can be defined as a process of arriving at a general consensus by a critical exchange of views in which the individual joins in active fellowship with others on the basis of his own choice and conviction and with the end of furthering a good life for him as well as for others.”\(^4\)\(^5\)

From the democratic experience in many parts of the world, we know that the basic concepts of democracy and their practices have brought the greatest good to the greatest number and can sustain and nourish the highest aspirations of mankind.

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 10.  
\(^5\) Kothari, Rajni, State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance, op. cit., p. 20.
Democracy is a complex of many components. It is distinguishable, of course, by its governmental institutions such as

- Universal Adult Suffrage
- Election
- Representative Government
- The Electoral Assembly
- Public Opinion

**Universal Adult Suffrage**: The word suffrage is of Latin origin and derived from ‘suffraguim’ which means a ‘vote’. The universality of adult suffrage is the world of freedom to franchise that is ‘franchir’ or to free a person on the basis of equality woven in human equality. As a principle, it ensures every adult member of the community, without any qualification, an entitlement to vote in direct election to choose the representatives in the formation of the Government. But in actual practice, suffrage is always restricted as most States exclude non-citizens, adults below certain age, lunatics, some kinds of convicts, bankrupts, idiots and such others who can not satisfy the conditions prescribed by the electoral rules.

The creed of ‘one person, one vote’ as the foundation of democratic government had to face many hurdles in the long journey of suffrage history. The idea of universal adult suffrage was accepted despite warning of H.L. Way Land that universal suffrage could not be justified without universal education. John Staurt Mill also vehemently opposed the introduction of the system of universal suffrage but strongly advocated its extension to women. “Men, as well as women do not need political rights in order that they may govern, but in order that they may not be misgoverned. The majority of male sex are, and will be all their lives, nothing else than labourers in corn fields or manufactureres, but this does not render the suffrage less desirable for them, nor their claim to it less irresistible, when not likely to make a bad use of it. No body pretends to think that women would vote as more dependents
at the bidding of their male relations. If it be so, so let it be. If they think for themselves, great good will be done, if they do not, no harm. It is a benefit to human beings to take of their fetters if they do not desire to walk."\textsuperscript{46}

Limited right to franchise was there in England in 1918, finally leading to full scale enactment of Equal Franchise Act in 1928. In the United States, the fate was no different and women had to wait till 1920 when Nineteenth amendment granted the right to vote to women of over 30 years of age only. Newzealand has the creditable distinction to be the first country to recognise the right to franchise to her womenfolk as far back in 1839. Indian Constitution recognised equal right to men and women alike from day one. On the other hand, an adult below the age of 21 who was not an electoral adult became eligible on lowering the age to 18 years, under section 2 of the Constitution (Sixty First Amendement Act 1988).

The significance of universal adult suffrage has been highlighted by Edward Shils who wrote: "The granting of universal suffrage without property or literacy qualification is perhaps the greatest single factor leading to the formation of a political society. The mere existence of the suffrage might in the course of the short time distegrate the nascent political society, if it is not accompanied by other changes as well. Nonetheless, the drawing of the whole adult population periodically into contact with the symbols of the centre of national political life must in the course of time have immeasurable consequences for stirring people up giving them a sense of their own potential significance and for attaching their sentiments to symbols which comprehend the entire nation".\textsuperscript{47}

“Democracy”, according to Dorothy Pickles, to be meaningful. “......must first be able to elicit as accurately as possible the opinions of as many people as possible of who should be their representatives... This means, at a minimum, universal suffrage, political parties and the organisation of free voting in uncorrupt election at frequent intervals. Second, it must provide way of ensuring that those chosen by the people do what in fact do what the electorate wants them to do or that they can be replaced even between elections.”

Elections then, become the bedrock of the representative democracy.

**Election:** The word ‘Election’ is of Latin origin and derived from the root ‘eligere’. ‘Election’ literally means ‘the public choice of a person for office.’ Election in political line is the blood and breath of democracy. Democracy survives and thrives on election. Elections are the language through which people voice their final verdict. The majesty of elections is that it gives the electorate an opportunity to sit in judgement upon the facts and fancies of the aspiring candidates or parties. Election is also viewed as a process Politischer Willenbuilding that it is a means through which political will is built up. Election reflects the numeracy of ideological census in its process of political exercise leading to the democracy. It is the process through which, people of a country choose the government, clothe it with legitimacy and make it representative.

In democracy, it is the people who make and unmake the government, In other words, a democratic government always remains responsible to its people. The praxis of liberal democracy is based on the theory of

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representation with two underlying principles of popular sovereignty and majority rule.

**Representative Government:** Foundation of modern system of representation thus, is based on two basic concepts: First, since sovereignty rests with the people, the government is responsible to the people. Second, will of majority is more important than that of minority. Carl J. Friedrich says, “The election of representatives therefore always involves the paring down of some claims; just can only be achieved if these claims are equitably adjusted. Presumably the majority’s claims are weighter than those of any minority. Representation is a broad thing: representatives are elected so that many may participate indirectly in the essential tasks. The majority participates through acting, the minority through discussion and criticism. If the majority fails to be represented adequately, because its representatives are unable to act, the injustice is just as great, or greater, than if the minority fails to be represented adequately, because its representatives cannot talk as much as they would like to.”

John Stuart Mill defined representative form of government as one in which “the whole people or some numerous portion of them exercise periodically elected by those the ultimate controlling power which in every constitution, must reside somewhere.”

However, the pre-eminence of the triology of party affiliation, issue orientation and candidate personification are the determinants of electoral choice. Political parties are considered to be essential for democratic dispensation and formation of government. Political actors dealing with issues organise public opinion. Unorganised interaction of many minds

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when converted into a social product, public opinion is formed. Public opinion then forms the basis of the concept of government by discussion.

The Electoral Assembly: The electoral assembly is the product of the freedom of choice exercised by the people through the process of the election and it reflects the collective wisdom of the electorate, voting is an incidence of election. In a multi-party democratic polity, difference of opinion is the rule and voting becomes inevitable. Voting is a valuable right. It can also be viewed as a social trust. Elections open up the golden channel of communication between rulers and the ruled. After all, it is the election which legitimises the right of the rulers to govern. The nature of representatives is considered to be that of a delegate who represents a geographical collection of opinions while retaining his own and he cannot be recalled or controlled to any degree by the electorate or fired by imaginary bullet of anger. The question of making a right choice of representative assumes supreme importance in this context. A right choice of representative is possible only under conditions of free and fair atmosphere of fresh air in circulation. If election is held in ritualistic way without being free and fair, it loses its meaning, purpose and moral force. Electorate corruption not only distorts the people’s choice in terms of the representatives but also the government built on the support of these representatives. Periodic elections based on open and fair competition make the electorate the masters of their choice in selection of representatives giving birth of an assembly. Every such assembly is a new one bearing the mark of installation, renewal or rejection of faith in the government in power. Under parliamentary system of government, a wider view of national scale of interest is taken by the representatives although they are elected from a territorial constituency. According to Edmund Burke, “Parliament is a delebrative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole –
where not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole. You choose a member indeed, but when you have chosen him, he is not the member of Bristol, but he is member of Parliament.”

Parliament as an elected legislative body is to ‘choose a ruler for the occasion’ and the person commanding the majority support emerges as the Prime Minister who is centre of birth, life and death of Ministry.

The chief functions of Parliament are elective, expressive and legislative. House of Parliament is constructed on the principle of ‘unite and rule’. The opposition, therefore, has to work in national interest while the government in power has to act in cooperation with the rest. The Parliament is constituted to maintain a responsible government and not to pose as a threat to its survival.

**Public Opinion:** It is a truism that democracy means government by public opinion. It represents at once a working measure of common agreement and a driving force in working the governmental machinery. It is an active and propelling factor in a democratic state. The people at regular intervals are called upon to elect the representatives and the electors express their opinion in favour or against certain programmes and policies put before them by different political parties. If the majority vote goes in favour of a party it gives a mandate to that particular party or coalition of parties, who had agreed on some basic principles prior to the election, to form government. The mandate is withdrawn at the next election if the confidence reposed in them had been betrayed. In fact, no party, whether in power or opposition, can afford to forget that tomorrow is the day of election. The

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ultimate appeal rests with the people, and the party in office must remember those who entrusted them with power. Responsibility and responsiveness to the people keeps the government alert and removes possibilities of arbitrary exercise of authority.

Democracy generates freedom and guarantees expressions of views to influence public policy. By giving citizens an opportunity to have their say, democracy binds them with a sort of vital tissue to government. There are thus, not only outgoing currents of commands and ordinances issued from the central seat of authority, but also incoming currents in the form of suggestions, desires and grievances of people. Democracy is the best qualified constantly to adjust the supply of control to social need and favours a wholesale social equilibrium. Public opinion enables democratization of political institutions and keeps them true to the constructive role and offset the shortcomings of expertise. Democracy lives and thrives on public opinion, provided it is honest, forceful and vigilant.

Rajni Kothari rightly observes: “A democratic system must give rise to an open and flexible society where individual freedom has the maximum scope to flourish. Second it must impart unity and stability to society, thus giving rise to conditions, which allow unfettered scope for individual creativity. Creativity is the ideal: a democratic system is the means to achieve the ideal.”

Evolution of Democratic Process in India

The concept of democracy is not new in India, as a substance of self-government lies imbedded in our past history. This system probably came

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into being because the village and the people were too distant from the centers of political power. Today this ancient institution has been transformed into a new organ of self-government at a district and block level as a link between the government’s programme and the people. Although the early Kings were autocratic, their power was in practice subject to definite checks, among which was the force of public opinion. The Mahabharata sanctions revolt against an oppressive king or one who fails to protect his subjects.

In the early Vedic period, traces of democratic spirit vibrated the heart of India’s functional republics. History bears testimony to the existence of a number of such republics functioning in line with the principle of People’s participation. Ancient Shastric literature, scriptures such as Rigveda, Aitaria Brahman, Panini’s Ashtadhyayi, Kautilya’s Arthashastra, Sukracharya’s Nitisara, the Mahabharata, inscriptions on Ashoka’s Pillars, writings of Buddhist and Jain scholars and the Manusmriti are replete with evidence of deliberately elected representative bodies like sabhas and Samitis in the form of Janapadas (regional bodies), Paura Sabhas (City Councils) and Gram sabhas (Village assemblies).

Nitisara, the science of polity by Shukracharya of the tenth century gives the idea of Indian Polity. It deals with the organization of the Central government as well as the town and the village life of the King’s Council of State and various departments of government. The village panchayat or elected council had large powers, both executive and judicial and its members were treated with the greatest respect by the King’s officers. Over a number of these village councils there was a larger panchayat or council to supervise and interfere if necessary.54

about grassroots democracy in his Glimpses of Ancient India mentioned the system of functioning of decision of majority as inviolable, not to be overridden because where many meet in an assembly and speak there with one voice, that voice or vote of majority is not to be violated by others."\(^{55}\)

Similarly, some old inscriptions tell us how the members of the village councils were elected, their qualifications and disqualifications. Various committees were, elected annually, and women could serve in them. The system of voting was by tickets (salaka) which were the slips of wood representing different opinions. Complicated matters and serious issues were often referred to special committee elected from among the members of the assembly.\(^{56}\) In case of misbehaviour, a member could be removed. A member could be disqualified if he failed to render accounts of public funds. Near relatives of members were not to be appointed to public offices to prevent nepotism.

The village councils were very jealous of their liberties and no soldier could enter the village unless he had a royal permit. If the people complained of an official, the king used to take the side, not of his offices, but of his subjects. If many complained, then the official was to be dismissed. The King was to act in accordance with the opinion of the majority of the people. Nitisara says that in making official appointments work, character and merit were to be regarded neither caste nor family and neither through colour nor through ancestors. There was a widespread system of self-government in towns and villages and the central


government seldom interfered. Customary law was strong and the political or military power seldom interfered with rights based on customs.\textsuperscript{57}

These democratic institutions started to decline with the passage of time and the republican states disappeared. However, Village Level Gram Sanghas, or Panchayats continued and subdued but survived till the advent of the British rule or even thereafter in one form or another. In the intervening period, the establishment of kingdom, replaced the idea of governance by many and the status of the kings began to be determined on hereditary principle. The Samitis and Sabhas (the assemblies and the councils of the kings) took the complexion of aristocratic bodies. The village councils comprising the village elders and notables derived their authority from consensus rather than through a mode of election. The same was true of Caste Panchayats. This way it paved the monarchical regimes which remained as the mainstay in medieval India.\textsuperscript{58}

In India the king had the right to collect certain taxes from the land and this revenue collecting was all he could delegate to others. The peasant in India, however, was not the lord’s serf. Thus in India there was neither landlord system nor was the individual peasant the full owner of his patch of land. Both these concepts were introduced much later by the British with disastrous results. Foreign conquests brought war and destruction, revolts and their ruthless suppression. Important consequences followed and the power of the self-governing village communities decreased and later various changes were introduced in the land revenue system. Nevertheless the Afghan and Mughal rulers took special care not to interfere with old customs and conventions and no fundamental changes were introduced, and

\textsuperscript{57} Nehru, Jawaharlal, The Discovery of India, op. cit., pp. 248-249.
\textsuperscript{58} Saha, Tushar Kanti, Democracy in Danger: Criminality and Corruption in Lok Sabha Elections, op. cit., p. 10.
The economic and social structure of Indian life continued as before. But changing times and conflicts, as well as the increasing centralization of government, slowly but progressively lessened the respect given to customary law. The village self-governing community, however, continued. Its break up began only under British rule.59

The idea of representative institutions emerged during the British rule in India. The Indian Councils Act, 1892, introduced the system of indirect representation. The non-official members of the Indian Legislative Council were to be nominated by the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and the Provincial Legislative Councils were to be nominated by certain local bodies such as universities, district boards, and municipalities. Dadabhai Naoroji pressed on the idea of wider representation. The Indian Councils Act, 1909 commonly known as the Morely-Minto Reforms formed the basis of direct representation for the first time. An element of election was introduced in the Legislative Council and the non-official members were given the opportunity of influencing the policy of the administration by moving resolutions on the Budget but it sowed the seeds of separatism by introducing the separate representation to Muslim community.

The August 20, 1917 declaration of the British government paved the way for the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India. The Government of India Act 1919 giving effect to Montford Report being an improvement on August 1917 declaration introduced the first dose of liberal democratic reforms aiming further devolution. Responsible government in the Provinces was introduced through the system of Diarchy. Under this system the subjects of administration were to be divided into two categories

- Central and Provincial. The Provincial subjects were sub-divided into ‘transferred’ and ‘reserved’ subjects. The subjects of all-India importance were brought under the category ‘Central’ while matters primarily relating to the administration of the provinces were classified as ‘Provincial’. The Provincial Legislature was empowered to present its own budget and levy its own taxes relating to the provincial sources of revenue. For the first time the Indian Legislature was made bicameral. The franchise was limited to 2.8 per cent of the population. The middle class, the small peasantry and tenant, womenfolk and labour were denied the vote in 1919, and only big landed gentry, tenants and rich professionals qualified for the vote.

The 1935 Act for the first time provided for a federal system. Under the new Act, the Provinces were for the first time given provincial autonomy, exercising executive and legislative powers in their own field, in their own right, free in normal circumstances from central control, in that field. The criterion of enfranchisement was fixed. Very few people had got the right to vote, which was 12 per cent of population. It occupies a very important place in the constitutional history of India. The present democratic process of India has been culminated from these pre dawn droplets and dew of democratic dose.

Partly from the traditional sources and partly from the western experience, India has evolved a modern democracy. During the years from the founding of Indian National Congress in 1885 to the final victory of freedom in 1947, patriotic, valiant men, such as Tilak, Tagore, Gandhi, Nehru and scores of other leaders laboured for the cause of self rule. Undoubtedly it was Gandhi, the saint like man, who more than any other gave a characteristically Indian form to the people’s aspiration for freedom and democracy emphasizing on grass-root democracy.
As a matter of fact, Gandhi considers the problems of democracy from the ethical rather than the political point of view. His ideas are more important because he wants to bring into prominence those moral standards, which have declined in the modern age. He accepts many of the underlying ideas of liberal democracy like popular sovereign representative government, party system, freedom of thought and expression but what he is most concerned with is the means for the achievement of the democratic ideal. He believes that true democracy can be brought about only through non-violent methods. Besides, “a democrat must be utterly selfless. He must think and dream not in terms of self or party but only of democracy.”

He regards unrestricted individuals as the law of the jungle. What is required is a mean, a condition that is halfway between the freedom of the individual and the control exerted by society. He also believes that equality does not mean the same thing as it does to the Socialists and the Communists. Unlike them, he is in favour of the abolition of private property. What he wants is that every individual must have equality of opportunity to develop his personality.

Since men are born with different talents, some will necessarily earn more than others. Those with superior intellect and talent should regard themselves as trustees, and the bulk of their earnings should be used for the good of all the citizens. The level of the rich should be lowered and the level of the poor should be raised, so that both may come nearer. This must be achieved not by violent revolution but by peaceful methods. These ideas of Mahatma Gandhi have great significance in this age of mass civilization when democracy is being threatened by dangers both internal and external.

It must be noted here that democracy is not the same in all countries. Democracy as a form of government is different in different countries depending upon the situations of respective country. Democracy is a process not a static situation. Accordingly, democracy means the participation of all the people in a process of how to run the government.

Among the many kinds of governments, democracy is considered as the best as it enunciates a system in which decisions are made with the participation of the people and the interests of the people are protected by their own involvement. The importance of democracy lies in the fact that in democratic polity, political power is exercised with the support of the people and the rulers seek justification of their action on the basis of the willing acceptance of the ruled. Thus, democracy presupposes less friction between the rulers and ruled.

In a democracy, dissents is recognized as an accepted fact and opposite opinions are allowed to exist and flourish simultaneously. It tries to assimilate the diverse points of view and accommodates the demands of different groups by bringing a rapprochement between the majority and minorities. It lessens the negative impacts of dissent and give an opportunity to the masses to change their representatives in due time.