

THE DEMISE OF DEMOCRACY: A REALITY

by

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Abstract

This paper took a closer look at the concept Democracy, a popular and fascinating slogan, the highest ideal of all times, one of the most controversial concepts in political science which has different meanings for different people, and a concept which has been a victim of many misinterpretations. The paper therefore has gone the extra mile to highlight the negativity that has bedeviled the concept, making it humanly unachievable and therefore a mere slogan that should be discarded for good.

Introduction

In the present day world, it is generally said that the Second World War was fought between democracy and dictatorial forces. The democratic forces wanted to make the world safe for democracy. The victory of the democratic forces showed the superiority of democratic theory and practice over undemocratic theory and practice. The issue of the merits and demerits of democracy has virtually become dead after the Second World War, but a more important issue emerged.

What is Democracy?

In our age, democracy has been misused by undemocratic rulers in such a way that it has lost its shape. Dictatorships have been established through democratic processes and many dictators have defined democracy in their own words to suit their convenience. The concept of “stable democracy” is one such concept that has virtually no meaning.

Thus, democracy has become a mere slogan and a confused theory. Rousell, (1964) writes “The most successful democratic politicians are those who succeeded in abolishing democracy and becoming dictators”. The greatest difficulty with the democratic theory is that democracy is understood more as a form of government and less as a social, political, and moral ideal.

DEMOCRACY AS A POLITICAL SYSTEM

In its narrow-meaning democracy is concerned with government and the state. In the ancient period, the Greek philosophers understood democracy as a political system. But during the modern period, especially the 17th and 18th centuries, democracy was primarily concerned with ideals. During the present century, especially after the Second World War, the American behavioral writers had emphasized mainly the political aspect of democracy. As a result different definitions of democracy have been given from time to time; some of the important ones are as follows:

- (1) Orwell, (1957) says, "In the case of a word like democracy, not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. The defenders of any kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using the word if it were tied down to any one meaning."
- (2) Sartori (1965) writes, "Democracy could be seen as a high flown name for something which does not exist."
- (3) Lucas (1976) writes "democracy is a noun but should be an adjective".
- (4) Seelay, (1962) "Democracy is government in which every one has a share".
- (5) About 2,400 years ago, in 422 B.C., the Greek philosopher Cleon defined democracy as "that shall be democratic which shall be of the people, by the people, for the people." In the modern period this definition was repeated by an American President Lincoln. But this definition is the literal meaning of the word "democracy" and does not bring out all the connotations of the concept democracy.

However, a lay man understands democracy as a political system characterized by adult franchise, periodic elections, at least two political parties, independent judiciary, representative and responsible government, strong public opinion, free press, and above all, a constitution which incorporates some fundamental rights. But this is a purely political meaning of democracy, Democracy is not merely a political concept, it is a much broader concept having a broader meaning.

The broader meaning of democracy is normative, and in this sense, democracy is an ideal; an end in itself, rather than a means to an end. Tawny, (1931) writes, "Democracy is unstable as a political system, as long as it remains a political system and nothing more, instead of being, as it should be, not only a form of government, but a type of society, and a manner of life which is in harmony with that type.

Elitist Theory of Democracy

The so called scientific temper, skeptical attitude, behavioural approach, and love for value-free study of politics of the "American political scientists, "has given

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birth to a new liberal theory of democracy during the past 100 years or there about. This is known as the elitist theory of democracy. Traces of this theory are found in the writings of Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), Gaetano Mosca (1855-1941), Robert Michaels and James Burnham.

These writers doubted the reality of the theory and maintained that democracy, in its classical sense, as the government of the people, is impossibility in practice. According to them, even in the present times, every government is Oligarchic, in which power and influence is shared only by some leaders or a ruling elite. Though the political elite may give the slogan of “will of the people”, “public interest”, “majority rule”, “responsible government, and popular sovereignty” to appease or bluff the people; though there may be elections once every five years, yet political organizations demands that the political power should vest in the minority (elite) rather than the majority (people). Every political system today is divided into the governors and the governed, and the governors are always a minority class (elite) who exclusively share power and influence. The “government of the people” is a sheer fantasy, a myth, a deceptive concept, which is impossible in practice. All the elitist theories deny that there can be in any real sense, government by the people. Similarly,

Aron (1966) writes, “it is quite impossible for the government of a society to be in hands of any but few....there is government for the people; there is no government by the people.” The elitist theory does not accept the concept of political equality as the governors and the governed can never be equal. The governors in spite of their declaration of being servant or maid servant of the people, are superior to the governed. Aristotle maintained that the governors and the governed are determined by birth itself.

Bourgeois Democracies

The most important features of bourgeois democracies are:

- (1) **Elections:** A lay man identifies democracy with elections which are regarded as the most important feature of liberal democracy. In liberal democracies, though elections may be free and fair, and various colourful manifestos of the different parties may give fabulous assurances, they do not reflect the common will of the people. The people have a right to vote, but they have no option except to vote for one bourgeois party out of the two or three different bourgeois parties.
- (2) **Multiparty System:** Liberal writers over-emphasize the need for at least two political parties in a democratic set up. On this basis, socialist democracy in which only one political party is allow to function is attacked, and it is said that it is an undemocratic system. Multiparty system is given undue importance by the writers on comparative politics and sometime, it is identified with democracy itself. The ideal two-party system is operating in Britain and America, but liberal

writers maintain, that both the parties in those democracies are like two bottles of the same wine with different labels. Stojanovic (1973).

- (3) **Liberty and Rights:** The most important among the liberties is the liberty of free expression. But the reality of this liberty can be analyzed by looking at the mass media-press, radio, TV and cinema. All these ideological apparatus are controlled by the property owners. Human brains are attacked from all directions with the result that although the brain belongs to man, yet it contains ideas of other classes. This is called false consciousness.
- (4) **Independent judiciary:** In the American constitution independent judiciary has been given importance as a necessary requirement of democracy. Independent judiciary acts as a check on the executive and legislature, and it is the watchdog of the constitution. However, Marxism believes that the judicial system is a part of the whole political system, or the state. In liberal democracies, judicial process is very complex and costly. In actual practice the poorer sections of the society cannot afford justice from the “independent judiciary” as they have neither the time nor the money needed to get it. For the working class it is cheaper to suffer injustice than to get justice from the courts.
- (5) **Constitution:** The constitution is regarded as the fundamental law of the land, made by the people, and it is said that it limits the government’s powers. The preamble of constitution begins with words like “WE THE PEOPLE”, But Marxism maintains that such constitutions, though framed in the name of the people, have a class character and their object is to provide a political system which serves the interests of a particular class.

Why Democracies are Unreal

Marxism maintains that democracies as we see them today are sham. In fact, they are bourgeois dictatorships where a minority of the capitalist rules over the majority of the workers. The main reason for the unreal nature of these is as follows:

- (1) In most, if not all democracies, political power is enjoyed by the capitalists and their representatives.
- (2) The election process is such that the working class parties have the last chance of winning.
- (3) The majority of population is denied active participation in the political affairs; political power is enjoyed by a few.
- (4) Though liberties and rights are given to all the people, in actual sense and practice they are reserved only for the capitalists.
- (5) Because of private property, the society is divided into two classes, and in such a society the economically dominant class rules;
- (6) Economic and social equality is missing in such societies.
- (7) The judicial process is very complex and costly and it benefits only they property class.

- (8) Because of the capitalist economic system, the working class does not have any control of industries and democracy is absent in the economic affairs.
- (9) The bureaucracy, police, and army serve the interests of the property owners rather than those of the workers.
- (10) The multi-party system does not reflect the reality of the liberal democracies, as the different parties generally, serve the interest of the capitalist class.

Further Negation of Democracy

- (1) **Rule of Ignorance:** Aristotle, the father of political science condemned democracy as a perverted form of government, a sort of mob rule, Plato, his teacher, dubbed, it as a rule of ignorance. Lecky, (1970), described it as the most ignorant, the most incapables who are necessarily the most numerous. The votes in democracy are counted and not weighed, decisions are arrived at by majority votes in the assemblies, judiciaries, and cabinets so that the wise, may be isolated and fools may carry the day. Moreover, the representatives selected by the masses are amateur, incompetent and inexperienced. They lack administrative skill and practical sagacity. Syndey (1960) said, “A youth must pass an examination in arithmetic before he can hold a second class clerkship in the treasury, but a chancellor of the Exchequer may be a middle –aged man who has forgotten what little he ever learnt about figures at Eton or oxford and is innocently anxious to know the meaning of those little dots”.
- (2) **It Favours the Rich:** Most of the modern democracies are capitalists. They favour the propertied classes. A few rich business magnets or big financiers purchase votes and otherwise exert influence over governments.
- (3) **Democracy has Ceased to be Government by Majority:** The number of votes secured by the party in power are sometimes less than the opposition: for example labour party of England which was victorious at the polls after the Second World War, did not get more votes than the opposition party. Democracy has thus ceased to be a government by majority. Besides, actual power is exercised by few dominant bosses of the party, while the rest of the members simply tow the line. Godwin, (1942) called democracy “a government by demagogue, grafters and the boss. Carlyle, (1962) has, therefore condemned democracy as a government by “wind bags and charlatans”. While, Onyejekwe, (2000), sees democracy as a government of the politicians, by the politicians and for the sole interests of the politicians”.
- (4) **Representative Principles of Democracy Questioned:** Democracy believes in territorial representation. A member of parliament elected from a particular constituency is supposed to represent everybody or a majority of the voters in that constituency. It is practically impossible for him to represent others in all capacity. He can at best represent his profession or his class of people. How can a lawyer represent teachers, doctors, goldsmiths, carpenters and even cobblers.

Hence it is suggested that functional representation should be substituted for territorial representation and instead of one parliament, there should be a number of them.

- (5) **Principle of Equality is Abused:** Equality is taken to an extreme in a democracy, which is based on the false premise that every man whatever his real worth or intelligence, is the equal of every other in his capacity to participate in government. Hence, everyone is given the right to vote, and no one's vote is to count for more than that of another in determining the policies of government as well as in choosing public officials. Such equality is detrimental to the interest of the society.
- (6) **It Impedes Scientific and Literary Progress:** Having a conservative outlook, the masses as a whole are hostile to scientific progress of the country. They seldom display any interest in the development of literature, art and architecture According to Burns, (1964) "The civilization which a democracy produces is said to be banal, dull and mediocre."
- (7) **Its Ethical Value is Questioned:** Democracy debases the masses, morally. The falsification and vilification campaign carried by political parties not only vulgarizes the issues, but accentuates corruption also. It makes leaders. Unscrupulous, and turns the masses into robots. Bryce, (1966) in his chapter on "the money power of politics" dwelled at length on corruption influence in democracy, on elders, members of the legislature, administrative officials and even judges. Votes are purchased by the highest bidder, and all moral principles are set at naught.
- (8) **Local Interest Obscure National Interest:** In the scramble for power and patronage in any democracy, the welfare of the masses as a whole suffers. Representatives compete with one another in securing maximum benefit for their own constituencies thus general interest of the nation is ignored.
- (9) **An Expensive Form of Government:** Democracy has become the most expensive form of government. A lot of expenses are incurred on propaganda and electioneering. Millions of money is spent in senatorial and presidential elections. Evidently, by a poor man without assistance of a party cannot dream of getting elected to a legislature, state or central.
- (10) **It amounts to mob rule:** democracy is a mob rule. Everything in democracy is decided by a majority of votes, political parties also constitute a group of men, who arrive at conclusion by a majority vote, people voting in a group or with a group lose their traits of character and merge themselves in the group.
- (11) **Not a stable form of Government:** Democracy is suitable so long as the mob stand by it. The unpredictable mind of the mob can at any time rebel against the government in power or overturn it.

Besides, democracy encourages class struggle and definitely the evils of party politics are adequately ingrained in democracy as is being witnessed in Nigeria today, and in virtually all so called democratic societies of the world, where the people have risen up to revolt against their government.

The recent happenings that have virtually enveloped the entire Arab countries of the Middle East and some North African nation are indicative of the peoples desire for a change. Same can be said of the developed democracies of America and Europe where the people are forcibly occupying vital public and government buildings in a bid to have a change. They claim that what is operative for now (democracy) amounts to sheer corporate greed and is no longer acceptable.

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