

DEMOCRACY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

DEMOCRACY

Definition : Democracy has been defined differently by different scholars. In fact, democracy comes from a Greek word, 'Democratic'. In Greek, 'Demo' means people and 'Kratia' means rule. Thus democracy means the rule of the people. As all the people cannot be engaged in this work of rule so this job is entrusted to their representatives who rule on behalf of the people. So, in simple words, we can say that democracy is a form of government in which the rulers are elected by the people. Abraham Lincoln, a US President, has defined democracy as " the government of the people, by the people and for the people." This definition is perhaps the most popular definition to this day.

◆ **Chief Characteristics of Democracy :** Democracy may be defined in any way, but these definitions do have some common features regarding democracy which may be narrated below:

1. In a democracy rulers elected by the people take all the main decisions and there is none above them to direct or guide.
2. In a democracy, elections are held regularly on the basis of universal adult franchise. These elections offer a fair opportunity to the people to change their present rulers.
3. In a democracy, all the people, without any distinction of caste, creed, colour or sex, are given this choice and opportunity on a equal basis.
4. In a democracy, the exercise of their choice of electing their rulers leads to a government limited by the rules of the Constitution and citizens' rights.

◆ **Difficulties which People Face in Non-Democratic Countries :**

People face various difficulties in nondemocratic countries like Chile, Myanmar, Pakistan, many kingdoms and Sheikhdoms etc.

1. In nondemocratic countries, the people are not allowed to criticise the government. Doing so means imprisonment, harassment and troubles one after the other.
2. In non-democratic countries, the rule of the king or the so called military rule prevails and the question of elections does not arise.
3. In non-democratic countries, no opposition is tolerated so the question of political parties, especially of the opposition parties, does not arise. Only those political parties can survive which toe to the line of the government.
4. In non-democratic countries, the workers are not allowed to form their independent Trade Unions. Only such Trade Unions can survive which, rightly or wrongly, support the policies of the government.
5. In non-democratic countries, all the people are at the mercy of the dictator or the military rulers. Anybody can be detained, arrested or even put to death without any trial.
6. In non-democratic countries, nobody can even aspire for an big post. If he is ready to be a tool in the hands of the ruler/dictator/military leaders, he can hope to get some good post. But he will have to kill his conscience and become dumb and deaf.

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◆ Distinction between Democratic and Non-Democratic Countries :

	Democratic Countries	Non-Democratic Countries
1.	In democratic countries, there is no danger to people's life by the established government	In non-democratic countries, the people have no security of life. They can be killed by military rulers in thousands as happened in Chile in 1973
2.	In Democratic countries the citizens enjoy the freedom of speech. The people can even criticise the governments	In non-democratic countries, there is no freedom of speech as was the case with the women of Calama who kept silent even after the slaughter of their men.
3.	In democratic countries, there are regular elections through which the people can change their government	In non-democratic countries, there are no regular elections and people have nor right to change their government
4.	In democratic countries, the opposition parties are allowed to function freely	In non-democratic countries, opposition parties are not allowed to function. Mostly, there is a one man or one party rule
5.	In democratic countries, there is the freedom of the press. There in no censorship of the press	In non-government countries, the press is kept under stricter control. It is not allowed to function freely.
6.	In democratic countries, workers are allowed to have their independent Trade Unions.	In non-democratic countries, the workers have no right to form their independent Trade Unions.
7.	In democratic countries, any people can aspire for any post. People belonging to ordinary families like Sh. Lal Bahadur shastri and Dr. APJ. Abdul Kalam can rise to the position of even Prime Minister or President of India	In non-democratic countries, the people can not aspire for any post. They are always under the thumb of the autocratic ruler or the dictator.

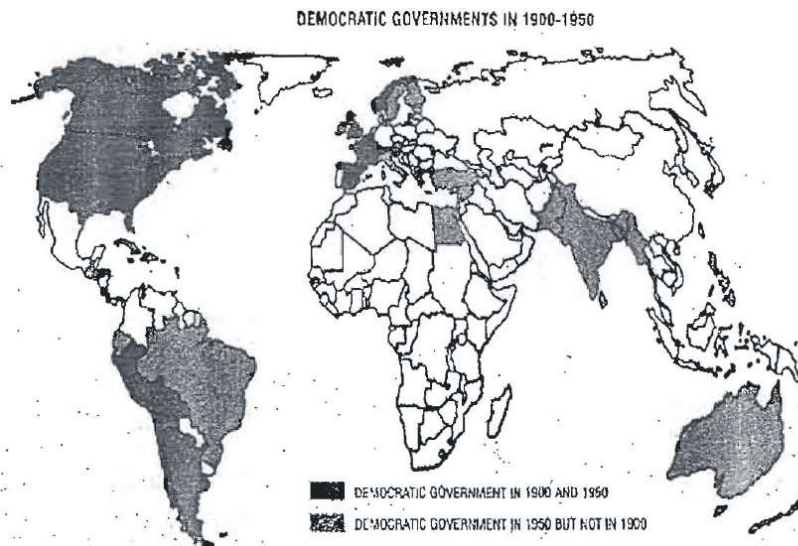
◆ EFFECTS OF DEMOCRACY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Now it is an admitted fact that democracy is the best form of government. Some of its good effects on contemporary world can be analysed below :

1. Democracy has ensured the safety of all the citizens under its umbrella.
2. Democracy has ensured the freedom of speech to all its adherent who can criticise the government if it is going astray.
3. Democracy has ensured free elections which enables the people to change their government after a specific period.
4. Democracy has ensured the existence of the different political parties which can always try to capture power and form the government.
5. Democracy has ensured the freedom of the press which can act as a lever to warn the government whenever it tries to go astray.
6. Democracy has ensured freedom to the workers to form their own trade unions.
7. Democracy has enabled all its citizens to aspire for any post, even if they belong to ordinary families like Sh. Lal Bahadur Shastri and Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, our former President.

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- ◆ **Chile :** Why democracy is the best form of government can be best understood when we see the people rising against military dictatorships and they did not sit ideal till they had established democratic governments in their country. One such country is Chile, situated in the south part of South America. There Salvador Allende was ruling on democratic lines as President from 1970 to 1973. But his government was toppled by a military coup on 11 September, 1973. The President died in the military attack and a government duly elected by the people was overthrown by the military through conspiracy and violence. The General Augusto Pinochet ruled the country for the next 17 years with the help of his armed forces. Thus was military dictatorship established in Chile. Many people who refused to join the coup were imprisoned and tortured. All this resulted in the unpopularity of Pinochet government. Under strong opposition by the people, he was forced to hold a referendum in 1988. He was of the opinion that people would support him but the people of Chile had not forgotten their democratic traditions. They voted against Pinochet and his military rule. Slowly and slowly under the next four President, the army's role in the country's government was eliminated. Pinochet's military rule was openly condemned by the people. In January 2006, Mrs. Michelle Bacshelet, whose family had been tortured during the military rule, was got elected as the President of Chile. Thus democracy was once again restored in Chile.

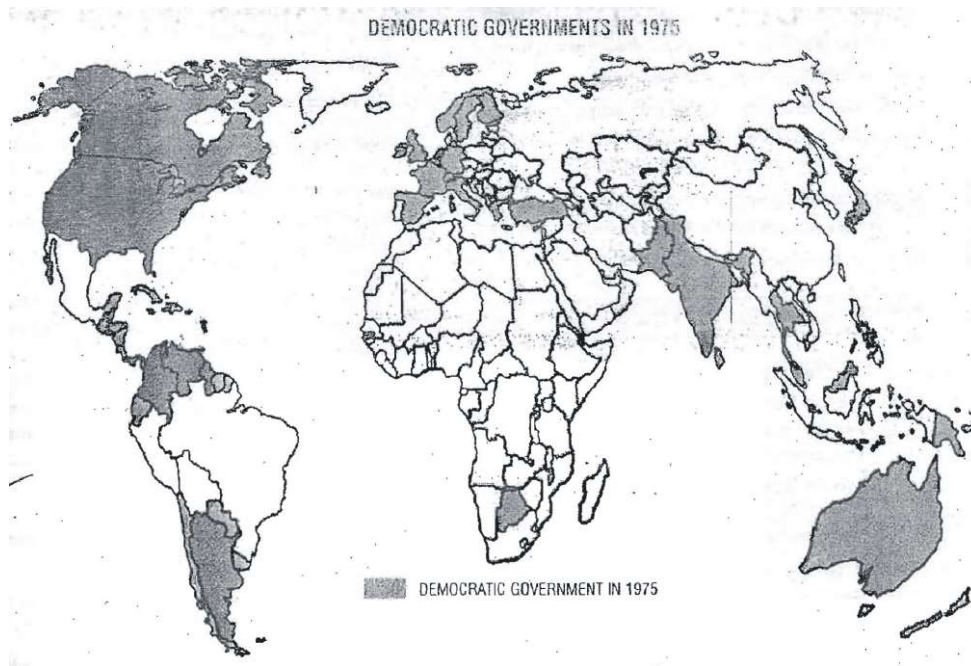


- ◆ **Poland :** In Poland, in Europe, there was dictatorship of one political party i.e., the Polish United Workers Party. No other party was allowed to contest the elections. In 1980, a communist government backed by USSR (or Russia) was ruling there. All the big factories and properties in Poland were owned by the government and as such no body had the right to strike. But forced by circumstances, sometimes the workers were forced to resort to strike. Such an incident happened in Gdansk, when on the question of unjustly dismissing a woman crane operator, the workers went on strike on 14th August, 1980. Soon Lech Walesa, another dismissed worker (an electrician) led this strike. The workers demanded the release of all political prisoners, taking back the dismissed workers, end of censorship and the right to form independent Trade Unions. The strike was so successful that the Government had to give in and almost all the demand of the workers were accepted.

As a result of the Gdansk agreement, the workers formed a new Trade Union called 'Solidarity'. The government, however, was not ready to allow people the freedom to organise, protest and express opinion quit freely so Martial Law was imposed in the country. Another wave of strikes began and ultimately upto 1988, the new Trade Union Solidarity became very powerful and successful in establishing true democracy in Poland. The reasons for the success and popularity of Solidarity are not too far to seek :

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1. The first reason for the popularity of this Trade Union was this that it was the first independent Union which was formed in any of the communist countries.
2. This Trade Union fought against the widespread corruption and mismanagement within the Polish government.
3. The members of this Trade Union made many sacrifices. At last this Union proved successful and when the right to free election was given to the people, this union won 99 out of 100 seats and its leader Lech Walesa became the first popularly elected President of Poland in 1989.



◆ **Portugal** : In the 20th century, many previously undemocratic countries made successful advances towards democracy. But it is a pity that even in some big countries, people could not express their opinion freely for a long time. One such country is Portugal in Europe.

Following are some features that make Portugal under Salazar (1926-1934) a case of non-democracy.

1. After overthrowing the democratic government in Portugal in 1926, he ordered the killing of all opposition leaders.
2. His government started a 'Concentration Camp' on a barren island to punish those who were involved in working class protests.
3. Spies of the secret police were placed at public places - cafes, railway stations, offices, universities, hospitals, post offices etc.
4. Because of the fear of arrest, the citizens could not dare to discuss politics freely.
5. Even, when after 1945, he allowed the opposition to contest elections, only they were given one month to campaign which was not enough to mobilise the public opinion in their favour.
6. No opposition was allowed after elections.
7. The elections were held irregularly every four or seven years.

Because of the above repressive measures, the opposition could not ever win even a single seat.

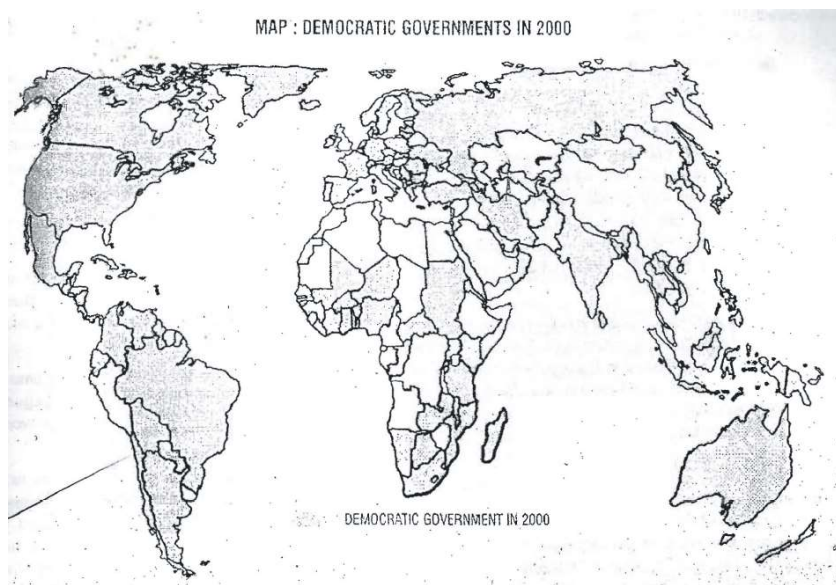
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- ◆ **Myanmar** : Myanmar, formerly Burma, got its independence in 1948. It started its journey as a democratic country but soon in 1962, the democratic rule ended there when there was a military coup in that country.

The following examples/facts clearly prove that the army rule in Myanmar is undemocratic :

1. An elected government of Aung Sang Suk Kyi was toppled by the military rulers.
2. The elected pro-democracy leaders along with Aung Sang Kyi were put under house arrest.
3. Political activities were jailed for seven to fifteen years on very trivial offences.
4. Anyone caught expressing views against the military regime can be sentenced to prison upto twenty years.
5. As a result of the above coercive policies of the military regime of Myanmar between 6 to 10 lakh people were forced to leave their country and seek shelter elsewhere.

Nepal : In the 1990s, the king there gave up many of his powers and agreed to be guided by the elected representatives of the people. In 2005, the new king of Nepal dismissed the elected government and tried to take back all the freedoms that were given to the people by the old ruler in the previous decade. But since then, Nepal is under turmoil and the Maoists have turned against the new ruler. The king is thus under pressure to restore democracy in that country and act as a Constitutional monarch.



PHASE IN THE EXPANSION OF DEMOCRACY

(A) The Beginning :

- (i) French Revolution of 1789 did not establish a secure and stable democracy in France. Throughout the nineteenth century, democracy in France was overthrown and restored several times. Yet the French Revolution inspired many struggles for democracy all over Europe.
- (ii) In Britain, the progress towards democracy started much before the French Revolution. But the progress was very slow. Through the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, series of political events reduced the monarchy and feudal lords. The right to vote was granted to more and more people.
- (iii) The British colonies of North America declared themselves independent in 1776. In the next few years these colonies came together to form the United States of America. They adopted a democratic constitution in 1787.

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- (iv) In the nineteenth century struggles for democracy often centered round political equality, freedom and justice. One major demand was the right for every adult citizen to vote. Many European countries that were becoming more democratic did not initially allow all people to vote. In some countries only people owning property had the right to vote. Often women did not have the right to vote. In the United States of America, the blacks all over the country could not exercise the right to vote until 1965.
- (v) By 1900, New Zealand was the only country where every adult had voting right. Early democracies were established in Europe, North America and Latin America.

(B) End of Colonialism :

For a very long time most countries in Asia and Africa were colonies under the control of the European nations. People of the colonised countries had to wage struggles to achieve independence. They not only wanted to get rid of their colonial masters, but also wished to choose their future leaders. Many of these countries became democracies immediately after the end of the Second World War in 1945.

(C) Recent phase :

The big push towards democracy came after 1980. The period after 1980 witnessed to fast emergence of democracies in different parts of the world.

- (i) Democracy was revived in several countries of Latin America
- (ii) Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991. As a result, Soviet influence over the former east European countries vanished' they changed themselves into democracies. The former 15 republics of the USSR got independent and opted for democracy.
- (iii) In India's neighborhood, countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal made a transition to democracy. Besides the aspiration of the local people in all these countries, a major reason for expansion of democracy was the open support extended by the USA to such demands.

◆ Causes for the Expansion of Democracy :

Now when we have studied about the expansion of democracy in the modern world, let us analyse what were the causes for the expansion of democracy in the 20th century.

The different reasons for the adoption of democracy are the following :

- 1. It is the Best Form of Government :** Of all the different forms of governments like dictatorship, military rule and one party rule. Democracy is the best form of government. The people all over the world love it and whenever they get a chance, they replace other forms of government. The idea of democracy has a power of its own and once the people become accustomed to democracy, they never leave it.
- 2. Freedom of Speech :** In democracy, the people are free to express their feelings without any fear of arrest as is the case in Myanmar, Chile, Portugal, Ghana or any other country under dictatorship or military rule.
- 3. People are Free to Elect their Government :** In democratic country, people are free to elect their government. If they find any government not to their benefit and well being, they can change it in the next elections.
- 4. People are Free to be Elected :** In a democracy any citizen can aspire for any post. People belonging to ordinary families like Lal Bahadur Shastri and Sh. Manmohan Singh can rise to any position like that of the Prime Ministership or Presidentship.
- 5. Democracy ensures Socio-Economic Equality :** Those people who have suffered from the deep rooted inequality in the social and economic field see a ray of hope in democracy.
- 6. External Changes also play a Vital Role in the Establishment of Democracy :** Not only internal developments but also many external developments like the Second World War, decolonisation and collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, also helped democracy.

DEMOCRACY AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

There is no denying the fact that democracy is the best form of government and more and more countries are becoming democratic. Now a question generally arises, does an increase in the number of democratic countries all over the world automatically lead to greater democracy at the global level. Some may agree to this view. They even advocate that in order to establish democracy in the non-democratic countries, they i.e., the other democratic countries, should issue sanctions against them. In their view, in certain cases, some powerful countries should combine together and launch an attack on undemocratic countries as was done by USA in Iraq on 14 th March, 2003. Such a thing can be done by the world body i.e., U.N.O.

But most of the authors do not agree with either of the above views due to various reasons:

◆ **Should Democracy be Established by External Forces ?**

Most of the people lay emphasis on the point that democracy should evolve through long struggle of its own people rather than it should be promoted by some external forces. They give the following reasons to support their views :

1. Firstly, It is said that democracy that is evolved through the long struggle of its people is closer to the idea of democracy because it creates no bad taste. The people have made sacrifices to achieve democracy so they know its value and they would do anything to guard it from all dangers.
2. Secondly, it is said that external help to promote democracy has not proved quite useful. It has proved dangerous both for the interests of the people and for the interest of their country.
3. Thirdly, it is pointed out that in the garb of promoting democracy in another country, the powerful countries begin to grind their own axe. They are usually found in promoting their own economic and military interests.
4. Fourthly, it is said that external help if at all proves helpful is only a nightmare. It leads to temporary improvement and does not prove durable.
5. Fifthly, those who try to maintain democracy with external help lose the trust and confidence of their own people.
6. Lastly, propping up democracy with the help of any external force goes against the spirit of democracy. The gift of democracy in a begging bowl adversely affects the self-respect of a country.

◆ **How far is it True that if Every Country becomes Democratic the World would itself become Democratic ?**

Most of the authors do not agree with this view. They hold the opinion that expansion of democracy within nations has not led to greater democracy at the international level. They give the following arguments in support of their view

1. Whereas democracy has given solace to the people in the national level, but in the international level, it has failed to do so because the democratic spirit is not there.
2. The United Nations represents almost all the countries (now 193) of the world, but everything roams about the five permanent members of the Security Council i.e., USA, Russia, U.K., France and China. Any one of them can reject or stall any decision of the Security Council. It means the rest of the countries (193-5=188) are more or less like pawns in the hands of these five countries.

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3. Take another example of the International Monetary Fund. Here too, the string is held by the G-8 countries (U.S.A., Russia, U.K., France, Germany, Italy, Canada and Japan) because they contribute most and they are weighted by how much they contribute to the International Monetary Fund.
4. Not only this, the President of the World Bank is always a citizen of U.S.A. nominated by the Treasury Secretary (or Finance Minister) of the U.S. Government. What more mockery of the international justice can be there ?
5. Take the case of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) which is a global institution where all decisions on their relations between different nations of the world have to be taken by consensus. But in actual practice, all decisions are taken in informal meetings which are kept secret and only few powerful countries are invited.

It is clear from the above discussion that whereas more and more nations are becoming democratic, the international organisations are becoming less democratic. But if the world has to become more democratic, equal participation of all the member nations should be ensured.

◆ Reason Out Why ?

- (i) Why is it necessary for people to discuss politics without fear ?
As a result of the presence of secret police in public places, the people could not discuss politics without fear. Without freedom of speech people could not possibly discuss anything and form their opinion about anything.
- (ii) Elections were held in Salazar's Portugal. Why should it not be called a democracy ?
Elections, without the freedom of speech, was a mere farce. It was like a body without the soul. How could a dead body be expected to work, act or react.
- (iii) Why do countries and cities change their names given by their colonial rulers ? Can you think of examples of similar change of name from India ?
Countries change their name, after independence, because no one wants to like the names given to them by their colonial rulers, who ruled them arbitrarily and unjustly.
In India, Madras has been changed to Chennai, Calcutta to Kolkata and Bombay to Mumbai. Likewise, the province of Madras has been changed to Tamil Nadu, Bombay to Maharashtra etc.
- (iv) Can you think of reasons why people like to have change in their undemocratic government ?
Freedoms denied to the people when a Democracy is overthrown by the Military. In 1973, a military rule or a non-democratic government was established in Chile, while in Poland, there was a non-democratic government before 1989. In both these countries, the people were denied the following freedoms when they did not have democracies :
 1. The people had no 'Right to Freedom of Speech' as was the case with the women of Calama in Chile.
 2. The people had no 'Right to form Associations or Trade Unions' as was the case with the workers (crane operators and electricians) in Poland.
 3. The people had no 'Right to have Free Elections' as was the case in Poland before the dawn of democracy there.
 4. It was because of the above reasons (i.e., no freedom of speech, no freedom of forming their own Trade Unions, no right to have free elections), the people liked to have a change in their dictatorial government.
- (v) Why was an independent trade union so important for Poland ?
Because only it could save the interest of the workers.

◆ **United Nations:**

The UN is a global association of nations of the world to help cooperation in international law, security, economic development and social equity. The UN secretary general is its chief administrative officer. It has 6 organ.

General Assembly: 193 countries form the membership of general assembly, also known as world parliament. Every member country sends five representatives but is allowed only one vote. Its headquarters are located in New York.

Security Council: Most important organ of UN. Has 15 members -Five permanent (Britain; Russia; China, America and France) and 10 nonpermanent members elected for two years each. Permanent members enjoy Veto power. Security Council can impose trade sanctions on the warring countries and can take military actions against them.

◆ **Is the UNO a democratic organisation?**

Everyone of the 192 member countries of the UN has one vote in the UN General Assembly. It meets in regular yearly sessions under a president elected from among the representatives of the member countries. General Assembly is like the parliament where all the discussion takes place. In that sense the UN world appear to be a very democratic organisation.

.But the General Assembly cannot take any decision about what action should be taken in a conflict between different countries. The fifteen-member Security Council of the UN takes such crucial decisions. The Council has five permanent members -US, Russia, UK, France and China. Ten other members are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. The real power is with five permanent members. The permanent members, especially the US, contribute most of the money needed for the maintenance of the UN. Each permanent member has veto power. It means that the Council cannot take a decision if any permanent member says no to that decision. This system has led more and more people and countries to protect and demand that the UN becomes more democratic.

Is the International Monetary Fund a democratic organization?

No, IMF is not working democratically.

(i) International Monetary Fund is one of the biggest moneylenders for any country in the world.

(ii) Its 173 member states do not have equal voting rights.

(iii) The vote of each country is weighed by how much money it has contributed to the IMF.

(iv) Nearly half of the voting power in the IMF is in the hands of only seven countries (US, Japan, France, UK, Saudi Arabia, China and Russia).

(v) The remaining 166 countries have very little say in how this international organization takes decisions.

◆ **Is Global institutions becoming more democratic than before?**

While nations are becoming more democratic than they were earlier, international organisations are becoming less democratic. Twenty years ago there were two big powers in the world: the US and the Soviet Union. The competition and conflict between these two big powers and their allies kept a certain balance in all the global organisations. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US appears to be the only superpower in the world. This American dominance affects the working of international organisations.

Over the last few years the people of different countries have come together without their governments support. They have formed global organisations against war and against domination of the world by a few countries and business companies.

◆ **Democracy Promotion:**

Story of Iraq: Iraq became independent from British Rule in 1932. Since 1968, it was ruled by Arab Socialist Bath Part. In 1979, Saddam Hussein became the President of Iraq. After becoming the president, Saddam ran a dictatorial government and suppressed any dissent or opposition to his rule. He was known to have got a number of political opponents killed and persons of ethnic minorities massacred.

The US and its allies like Britain alleged that Iraq possessed secret nuclear weapons and other 'weapons of mass destruction' which posed a big threat to the world. but when a UN team went to Iraq to search for such weapon, it did not find any. Still the US and its allies invaded Iraq, occupied it and removed Saddam Hussein from power in 2003. the US installed an interim government of its preference. the war against Iraq was not authorized by the UN Security Council. Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, said that the US war on Iraq was illegal. After the war, it is being argued that it was important to end the dictatorial rule of Hussein and set up a democratic government in that country.

GLOSSARY

- 1. Democracy :** A form of government which is chosen by the people to work for their welfare and can be voted out by them.
- 2. Dictatorship :** It is form of government in which a person or group of persons possess absolute power without effective constitutional limitations.
- 3. Solidarity :** A trade union movement founded by Lech Walesa which helped to end communist rule in Poland.
- 4. Decolonisation :** The process of transfer of power from the colonial powers to independent nations governments in Asia and Africa.
- 5. United Nations Organisation :** An organisation founded in 1945 that includes most countries in the world and serves as a international forum to settle international disputes.
- 6. Veto :** The special right to override the decision of the Security Council enjoyed by the five permanent members of the Security Council of United Nations.
- 7. Constitutional Monarchy :** A government headed by a king or queen whose powers are limited by a constitution.
- 8. Revolution :** The term means a recognised momentous change in the situation. A revolution can result in the sudden overthrow of an established government or system by force and bloodshot e.g., the French Revolution.
- 9. Glorious Revolution :** In 1688 William III of Orange, the son-in-law of James II and ruler of Holland, became King of England without any bloodshed. The unpopularity of James II prompted a group of politicians to invite William III to England. Ultimately due to evens following this revolution, England more or less became a constitutional monarchy.
- 10. World Trade Organisation :** It was set up in 1995 by members of the United Nations to promote trade between countries.
- 11. Trade Union :** An association of workers for the purpose of maintaining or improving their working conditions.
- 12. Strike :** Mass refusal by workers or employees to perform work due to certain grievances or because demands are not being met.
- 13. Referendum :** A direct vote in which an entire electorate is asked to accept or reject a particular proposal. This is also called as Plebiscite.
- 14. Political Prisoners :** Persons imprisoned or detained or kept under house arrest, because the government considers their ideas and activities a threat to its authority.
- 15. Coup :** The sudden overthrow of a government which may or may not be violent in nature.
- 16. Coalition :** An alliance of people, associations parties or nations which may be temporary or a matter of convenience.
- 17. Censorship :** A condition under which the freedom of expression is taken away. Anything that the government finds objectionable cannot be published.