

Q)What do you mean by direct democracy?Discuss the methods of direct democracy.

Ans: The traditional forms of democracy are described as direct and indirect.In direct democracy,people are themselves the rulers and there is no distinction between the rulers and the ruled. **Direct Democracy**, also called '**pure democracy**', is a form of self-government in which all collective decisions are taken through participation of all adult citizens of the state in a mass meeting.The people formulate laws,elect officials,decisions are taken on important issues etc in a mass meeting. According to the ancient **Greek philosopher Aristotle**, the important aspect of direct democracy is the mechanism that "all command each and each in his turn all".

In the small city-states of ancient Greece, the adult male citizens met together in the Assembly and discussed important public issues. This type of democracy is possible only in countries, small in population and not very large in territory. That is why it was there in city-states like Athens in ancient Greece. In modern days it prevails only in four Cantons of Switzerland and they are Appenzell, Uri, Unterwalden and Glarus and some states in the U.S.A such as Vermont, Maine etc. In India, direct democracy was seen in Vajji Sangha during the Buddhist periods. Gram Sabha, as envisaged in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, is an instance of direct democracy in rural India. Many theorists, philosophers, politicians, and social critics discussed on direct democracy and some of the most important among them are Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Stuart Mill.

Methods of direct democracy:

There are four methods or devices of direct democracy which are as follows:

1) **Referendum:** It means seeking public opinion on any law or amendment of the Constitution. There is a special procedure of referring a particular bill or constitutional amendment for popular vote. If a majority of people vote in its favour, the bill becomes law. It is a negative power of the people to put a check on undesirable legislation by the government. This method is prevalent in Switzerland and also in many other countries like Japan, France, Sweden etc.

Two types of referendum are there in Switzerland: obligatory/compulsory and optional. In case, the Federal Assembly intends to amend the constitution, referendum becomes compulsory or obligatory. If the majority of the people and the States (Cantons) give their consent, it will be considered as amendment to the Constitution. Under optional referendum, a specified number of voters may, by petition, demand a popular vote on a law passed by the legislature.

2) Initiative: Another method of direct democracy is initiative . It is the device through which the people make proposals for legislation or initiate proposals for amendment in the Constitution. A specified number of people drafts the bill and sends it to the legislature for its consideration. In Switzerland ,50,000 citizens can send an application to the Federal Assembly for the amendment of the Constitution.If the Federal Assembly accepts the resolution,it at once starts taking steps to convert it into a Bill. If the proposed Bill is accepted by the majority of the people and the States,it is to be considered as amendment of the Constitution.It is a positive power in the hands of the people to initiate a law which they desire to be passed.Thus it is used for the amendment of a Bill or the Constitution.

3) Plebiscite: Literally it means 'decree' of the people. Prof. C. F. Strong says that it is a device to obtain a direct popular vote on a matter of public importance. It is used only for political questions, and not laws. It is used from time to time. For example, at the time of Kashmir's accession to India in October 1947, the Government of India, in order to avoid war with Pakistan, agreed for plebiscite.

4) Recall: Under this method, the sovereign power lies with the people as they have the right to recall their representatives from his office if they are not satisfied with his work. At any time when a majority of the electorate desire it, the office-holder is removed from his office. This system is prevalent in some of the American States like Montana, Oregon, California etc. It is also seen in Communist China as well.