Q) What do you mean by proportional representation? Discuss its merits and demerits.

Ans: Proportional representation is a concept in voting systems used to elect an assembly or council.It characterizes electoral systems in which divisions in an electorate are reflected proportionately in the elected body. Its basic principle is that are that all voters deserve representation and all political groups in society are to be represented in legislature in proportion to their strength in the electorate. It means that the number of seats won by a party or group of candidates is proportionate to the number of votes received. For example: under a proportional representation voting system,if 30% of votes support a particular party then roughly 30% of seats will be won by that party.

**Three ingredients of proportional representation:**

1. There should be a multi-member constituency.
2. A candidate should be elected not by gaining an absolute majority or relative majority but by obtaining a quota of votes that is equivalent to the total number of votes cast and divided by the number of seats to be filled.
3. There should be a mathematically exact,as far as possible,representation of the electorate in the legislature.

**Two devices of proportional representation:**

1. **Single Transferable Vote System:** There should be Plural constituency in this system. The advantage of this system is that every voters marks the figures 1,2,3,4 against the name of the candidates and in this way he can indicate his preferences. He can vote for as many candidates by denoting his preference,as there are seats to be filled from the constituency. The candidate in order to be selected requires a certain quota of votes. Thus the candidate who had secured the quota of votes is declared elected.
2. **List System:** According to this system, the entire country is divided into large constituencies and sometimes the entire country is considered as one constituency. All candidates are grouped in the lists according to their party labels and every party offers a list of candidates up to the number of seats to be filled in each constituency. The number of votes which are secured by the individual candidates are considered as votes for the list. In other words,every party fields as many candidates as are the seats to be filled. The elections are contested on the party basis and the voters cannot cast more than one vote in favour of one candidate.

**Merits of proportional representation:**

The system of proportional representation has been appreciated for several reasons which are as follows:

1. In this system representation to every minority is ensured and thus the minority is satisfied.
2. The voters get political education in this system,as they are given the choice to elect good candidate in an order.
3. This system is based on justice,because all parties get due representation in it.
4. The voters get the right to elect the candidates according to their preferences and they are supposed to be careful while showing their preferences. This leads to the election of good candidate.
5. It helps to elevate the character of the legislature by securing the election of more enlightened and distinguished representatives.
6. The voter is more free,as he can indicate his preference of candidate
7. The sphere of corruption and wastage of money is reduced because the influence of such parties is less.No one party commands much influence in the legislature.
8. Generally,coalition governments are formed in this system. They take care of all in order to maintain a stability.

Demerits:

But the system of proportional representation has its demerits which are as follows:

1. It is not an unmixed blessings. The number of candidates to be elected from one constituency is very large.As a result, it is bound to create confusion in the minds of the people,and under the circumstances they cannot be expected to vote intelligently.
2. This system inevitably leads to the multiplication of political parties. Even a small section of public opinion can manage to set up a new political party. The multiplication of parties is not in the higher interests of the country. A few politicians may gain but the country as a whole is bound to suffer . Every government has to be a coalition government which is considered to be a weak government.
3. It perpetuates a multi-party system which is not a stable or effective government. It prevents development of disciplined parties and encourages factional groups and also frequent and temporary party alliances.
4. There is no provision for bye-elections and consequently it is difficult to judge the trend of public opinion with the passage of time. There is every possibility of over-representation of small minorities in certain cases. The list system puts all the powers in the hands of the political parties which can lead to a lot of corruption.
5. Dicey says that the mathematical representation of all sorts of opinion is highly objectionable. There may be an opinion which may be bad,foolish and even undesirable.
6. The system destroys the prospect of personal relation between the member and his constituencies and he would simply become an item in a list voted only on party grounds. The election campaign becomes less intensive and more extensive.
7. It involves a lot of calculations.This makes it cumbersome,complex and difficult.
8. It elevates the importance of the political party system while diminishing the importance of the voter.