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Basic principles of Political Theory  
Topic - Democracy - 2  
Lecture - 23

### Pluralist Theory

Pluralist theories of democracy fall into categories: (a) the elitist-democratic theories which regarded the plurality of elites as the foundation of modern liberal democracy, such as those advocated by Karl Mannheim and Raymond Brown; and (b) the group theories which interpret democracy as a process of bargaining among relatively autonomous groups; the existence and functioning of these groups in a democracy lends a pluralistic character to the polity; this view is regarded to be representing the main tenet of mainstream pluralist theory of democracy.

In the United States, A. F. Bentley (The process of Government; 1908) and David Truman (The Governmental process; 1951) interpreted democracy as a political game played by a great variety of groups. According to this interpretation, the government is

the focal point for public pressure and its task is to make policies which reflect the highest common group demand. Thus, democratic society is seen as a pluralist, differentiated society where the management of public affairs is shared by a number of groups having different values, sources and methods of influence.

Robert Dahl, in his A preface to Democratic Theory (1956) developed a model of the democratic process which he described as polyarchy. This corresponds to the models developed by Bentley, Truman and B. Latham (The Group Basis of politics; 1952) variously known as pluralism or the group theory. The term pluralism is used here in the sociological sense that is to describe the pluralistic nature of democratic society, rather than the philosophical sense as a political ideal, associated with the pluralistic theory of sovereignty. The pluralist theory of democracy, on the other hand, introduces pluralism for a scientific explanation of the political process.

Theory of Participatory Democracy  
Concept of democracy implies that ultimate authority of governance

should rest with the people themselves. When this idea is sought to be implemented through the mechanism of representative democracy, it is possible that the people may become inactive after choosing their representatives till the next general election. Moreover, when the size of a democratic community expands geographically and it includes a large population with a variety of composition in terms of race, religion, language and culture, the distance between the people and their representatives is likely to widen. For example, in large democracies like India and the United States, a very small section of citizens participates in any discussion, and very few citizens enter into contact with their representatives. Does not this state of affairs point to the erosion of democracy?

Concept of participatory democracy repudiates this model of democracy as it regards people's political participation as the basic principle of democracy. In short, political participation denotes the active involvement of individuals and groups in the governmental process effecting their lives.

# Forms of political participation

