Chapter 18: The State, the Government, and You

Questions — Questions and Activities

Q1 "Every democracy is a republic." Is this statement true or false? Explain.

SOLUTION

This statement is FALSE.

The chapter distinguishes clearly between the two concepts:

Democracy means 'rule by the people' (demos = people, kratos = rule). In a democracy, people have the power to choose their government through free and fair elections.

A republic is a form of government where the head of state is elected — directly or indirectly — by the people, rather than being a king or queen who inherits power. In a republic, the powers of rulers are also limited through a constitution or laws.

A country can be both a democracy and a republic (e.g., India and the USA). However, not all democracies are republics. The UK, Canada, and Sweden are democracies — people elect their representatives — but they are not republics because they each have a hereditary monarch as their head of state.

Therefore, 'every democracy is a republic' is false: a democracy is about how rulers are chosen by the people, while a republic is specifically about the head of state being elected rather than hereditary. You can have one without the other.

Answer: False. Not every democracy is a republic. A democracy means rule by the people through free elections, while a republic specifically means the head of state is elected, not hereditary. The UK, Canada, and Sweden are democracies but not republics — they have hereditary monarchs as their heads of state. India and the USA are both democratic republics.

Q2 Give two reasons why decentralisation is important in India.

SOLUTION

Decentralisation means spreading power and decision-making so it is not concentrated in one place or group. The chapter gives the following reasons for its importance in India:

Reason 1 — Better knowledge of local needs: Local leaders know the area, its

needs, and the traditions of the people far better than distant central officials. Local issues such as water supply, roads, broken streetlamps, and schools can be discussed and solved by the people who face them every day. A distant central or state government cannot respond as quickly or accurately to local problems.

Reason 2 — More democratic participation and accountability: When power is decentralised, people get a greater chance to be involved in decisions that affect their daily lives. Panchayats and municipalities become lively places where people participate actively. Because leaders are closer to the people, it is easier to question them, ask for answers, and hold them accountable for their work.

Additionally, the chapter notes that India is a vast, diverse country of over 1.4 billion people, many languages, and thousands of towns and villages. A single central government cannot meet the needs of all its people, making decentralisation a practical necessity.

Answer: Two reasons decentralisation is important in India: (1) Local leaders have better knowledge of the area's needs and can solve local problems — like water supply or broken streetlamps — faster than distant officials. (2) It strengthens democracy by giving people more say in decisions that affect their daily lives and making leaders more accountable since they are closer to the people they serve.

Q3 Imagine you are part of your school's student council. The council works like a mini-parliament — it has members elected by students, debates issues and makes decisions. In this context, do you think it would be better if only the council president makes all the decisions or if power is to be shared among all members? Should the student council have the power to make rules about the food you eat, or the language you speak? What can go wrong if the student council is the most powerful body in your school and no one questions its decisions?

SOLUTION

Power sharing vs. single-president rule:

It is better if power is shared among all members rather than concentrated in the president alone. As the chapter explains for India's democratic republic, when power is concentrated in one person or one group, there is a risk that the interests of the majority — or simply of the most powerful — may dominate unfairly over others. Shared decision-making through debate and voting ensures that diverse voices are heard, just as India's Parliament debates laws before passing them.

The chapter's lesson from the RWA example also shows that a majority decision (the 9 pm delivery ban) can harm minorities (the elderly and sick) unless the rules are checked and balanced.

Should the council make rules about food or language?
No. The chapter explains that even elected representatives cannot make any law they wish — the Constitution places fundamental rights beyond their reach (freedom of speech, equality, etc.). Similarly, a student council should not make rules about personal choices like food or language, as these fall within the individual rights of each student. Such rules would mirror 'dominance of the majority' — the council imposing its preferences on all students. A governing body's power should be limited to matters of common concern (like school events or cleanliness) and not extend to personal freedoms.

What can go wrong if no one questions the student council?
If the student council is the most powerful body and is never questioned, its members could misuse their power — making unfair rules, favouring certain groups, or ignoring the complaints of others. The chapter highlights this risk at the level of government: 'The government can use force to maintain law and order, but the Constitution limits its powers; otherwise, elected members and government officers might use their power unchecked, which would threaten citizens' rights.' The same logic applies at school level — without checks (teachers, the principal, or a right to appeal), the council could become arbitrary, unjust, and unaccountable.

Answer: Power should be shared among all members, not concentrated in the president, because shared decision-making prevents unfair dominance of one voice. The council should not make rules about food or language, as these are personal freedoms beyond any elected body's legitimate authority. Without checks and questioning, the council could misuse power, favour certain groups, and violate the rights of other students — the same risk the chapter identifies for governments unchecked by the Constitution.

Q4 Ask your parents / guardians how they engaged with the government over the past year. Make a list and classify the items based on the level of government they had to work with. What challenges did they face?

SOLUTION

This is a personal research activity. Here is guidance on how to do it well.

Step 1 — Interview your parents or guardians: Ask them to recall any dealings they had with any level of government over the past year. Prompt them with examples: paying taxes, renewing a licence or ID, applying for a government certificate, using a government hospital or school, attending a panchayat or ward meeting, complaining to a municipality about a local problem, applying for a subsidy or scheme, etc.

Step 2 — List all instances: Write each engagement as a short entry, e.g. 'Renewed driving licence at the RTO' or 'Complained about broken streetlight to the municipality.'

Step 3 — Classify by level of government:
Local government — panchayat, municipality, ward office, municipal corporation
State government — state departments (e.g., transport, education, public health), state courts
Central government — passport office, income tax department, railway reservations, Aadhaar/PAN updates

Model list (example answers):
Paid property tax — local government
Enrolled younger sibling in a government school — local/state government
Applied for a new passport — central government
Filed income tax return — central government
Visited a government hospital — state government
Complained about a pothole to the municipal office — local government

Step 4 — Note the challenges: Ask your parents what difficulties they faced — long queues, confusing forms, too many offices to visit, lack of information, delays, having to go back multiple times, language barriers, etc.

Step 5 — Reflect: The chapter explains that citizens engage with the government at all three levels, and that knowing which level handles which issue helps people get their work done more effectively.

Answer: Model answer: Common family engagements with government over a year include paying property tax and complaining about local infrastructure (local government), enrolling children in government schools or using public hospitals (state government), and renewing passports or filing income tax returns (central government). Typical challenges include long wait times, complicated paperwork, multiple trips to offices, and unclear information about which office handles what. Classify each engagement by the level of government — local, state, or central — based on who was responsible for that service or function.

Q5 Think about these real-life situations in relation to India's democracy: Should the Parliament be the most powerful institution in the country? Why or why not? Should the Parliament have the power to make any law it wants, even if it affects your rights? What could go wrong if lawmaking has no limits? Can it lead to unfair or unjust laws? Who is more powerful in India, the Parliament or the Supreme Court? Give your reasons.

SOLUTION

Should Parliament be the most powerful institution?
No — not without limits. The chapter explains that in India's democratic republic, no single organ of government should become too powerful. The Constitution establishes 'checks and balances' among the legislature, executive, and judiciary. Parliament makes laws, but those laws cannot violate the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. The judiciary acts as a 'watchdog' and can strike down laws that are unconstitutional. So Parliament is very powerful, but it functions within the framework the Constitution defines.

Should Parliament make any law it wants, even affecting your rights?
No. The chapter states clearly: 'The elected leaders cannot pass laws that go against people's basic rights — like freedom of speech, religion, or equality before the law.' This is a key feature of a republic — the rule of law is more powerful than the wishes of the majority. Parliament represents the majority, but in a republic it is constrained from using that majority to take away the fundamental rights of any citizen, especially minorities.

What could go wrong if lawmaking has no limits?
If lawmaking has no limits, it can lead to 'dominance of the majority' — where the more powerful majority enacts laws that harm or oppress smaller, less powerful groups. The chapter gives the RWA example: a majority vote banned night

deliveries, which endangered the sick and elderly (a minority). Without any check on that decision, it remained unjust until someone challenged it. At the national level, unchecked lawmaking could lead to laws stripping citizens of their rights, silencing dissent, or favouring one religion or community over others.

Who is more powerful — Parliament or the Supreme Court?
Neither is absolutely more powerful than the other — they have different, complementary roles with checks on each other. Parliament makes laws; the Supreme Court interprets and reviews them. The chapter states that the judiciary 'acts as a referee when the government or others break the law' and ensures that laws do not violate the Constitution through judicial review. So the Supreme Court can strike down a law passed by Parliament if it violates the Constitution. On the other hand, Parliament can modify the Constitution through a constitutional amendment with the required majority. Ultimately, the Constitution is supreme, and both Parliament and the Supreme Court derive their authority from it.

Answer: Parliament should not be the most powerful institution without limits — the Constitution and the judiciary check its power. Parliament cannot make any law it wants if it violates fundamental rights (freedom of speech, equality, etc.). Without limits, lawmaking could lead to oppression of minorities and unjust laws — the 'dominance of the majority' the chapter warns against. The Supreme Court can strike down unconstitutional laws (judicial review), while Parliament can amend the Constitution with a special majority. Ultimately, the Constitution is supreme and both derive authority from it.