



The working of democracy in India: Problems and prospects

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Abstract

Democracy is a form of government in which people either directly or indirectly participate in the decision-making process through a system of representation involving periodically held free elections. The Democracy of India is considered as the largest democracy in the world. In a democracy, authority is enjoyed by the people or their representatives and people are the final authority in every field of system of governance. However, in modern India, democracy has faced a lot of challenges like social and economic inequalities, poverty and unemployment, Illiteracy, Casteism, communalism, corruption, terrorism, population explosion. It is required to be addressed to sustain true parliamentary democracy in India. This paper tries to examine and analyse the existing democratic system in India & its implication towards the democratic system of the world. It also suggests certain possible measures or institutional reforms in order to ensure a healthy and sustainable democracy for India.

Keywords: democracy, illiteracy, casteism, corruption, unemployment, terrorism

Introduction

Democracy is a system of political arrangement in which the common people and government together create a civil society and build a common future. We live in the era of democracy and the majority of the world's people live in the countries with a democratic system of government. Most of the countries including India have adopted the democratic setup of Governance. Amongst the democratic countries, India is considered as the largest democracy in the world. The origin of the concept of democracy can be traced to ancient Greece. As a form of government, it existed in the city-states of ancient Greece. The term 'democracy' has been derived from the two Greek words - 'demos' which means 'people' and 'Kratos' which means 'power'. Hence, democracy means the power of the people. In other words, democracy means as a system of government in which authority of the governs lies with the people either directly or indirectly through a representative.

Democracy was defined by Abraham Lincoln, the then President of USA, as "the government of the people, by the people and for the people". This definition has been accepted as the most appropriate definition of democracy. David Held said that "I believe that the most defensible and attractive form of democracy is one in which citizens can participate in decision making in a wide array of sphere." Another most important definition of democracy given by Joseph A. Schumpeter is that "Democracy is a political method or an institutional arrangement for arriving at political, legislative and administrative decisions by vesting in certain individuals the power to decide on all matter as a consequence of their successful pursuit of the people's vote". Democracy and its dimensions underwent changes during the period of transformation from ancient Greece to the modern world. As a result, the pattern of democracy that prevailed in ancient Greece assumed an entirely different and new shape. In this context, Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru observed that "Democracy is tolerance, it is tolerance

not only towards those who agree (with us) but also with those who disagree" (Nehru, 1950). Those who do not believe in democracy or have no faith in democracy follow paths of violence and intolerance. The twentieth century has witnessed a movement led by eminent scholars of Political Science which rejects the belief that democracy is a political concept, a way of making governmental decisions and accepted democracy as a way of life. However, in this context, John Dewey expounds that Democracy is a form of government, it is a kind of economy, it is an order of society, and it is a way of life. It is just a social faith in which the governable decisions can be achieved & every citizen gets opportunities to progress in every field of life.

However, from its initial stage, the term democracy had been accepted as a political concept, but the modern world has assumed another two characteristics of democracy-economic and social democracy. In a political democracy, the government is based on the consent of the people and as a system of government in which citizens of the country have a share of power. Differences in public opinion, criticism of the government are some of the elements of this democracy. In a social democracy, the dignity of the human being is honoured. The democracy respects each and every section of the society as a social and human being. In this system of governance, democracy provides an ample opportunity to maintain a dignified human community. The economic democracy aims at reducing the gap between the rich and the poor, freedom from hunger, social security. This is the most important aspect of democracy, without which the political and social democracy would be meaningless.

Democratic System & India

After interdependence, India became the Democratic Republic on 26th January 1950 by introducing its own Constitution with a Preamble. In India, The term 'Democracy' has been used for the first time in the

Preamble of the constitution which is based on the concept of popular sovereignty. The framer of the constitution of India provides a representative Parliamentary democracy in which the executive is always responsible to the legislature for its actions, policies and other works. There are three types of democracy - Political Democracy, Social Democracy & Economic Democracy in India. In this context, it has been observed that the constitution of India aims to establish an egalitarian society for each and every citizen to provide social, economic & political justice in a social and economic democracy. Some of the modern fundamental principles that are practiced even in modern times are laid down in the Indian constitution - (1) in democracy, people hold as the source of sovereign power & government is based on the consent of the people. (2) The constitution provides certain fundamental rights to the citizens of India and it is the supreme duty of the constitution to protect the fundamental rights of the individuals. (3) Provision of Special protection for those who are socially and educationally marginalized in India. (4) Rule of law is the fundamental principles of the democracy & Governing process established under it. (5) The provision of Directive Principles of State Policy that ensure social and economic equality in India. Economic democracy is the most important aspect of democracy. (6) A Transparent and independent election throughout the country with constitutional election machinery. These are requisites for sustaining democratic governance in the Indian republic.

The objective of the study

The following are some objectives of the study.

- a. To study the Indian system of democratic governance and its implications to the world democratic system
- b. To study the major issues or challenges being faced by the Indian democratic setup
- c. To suggest possible measures to response to the challenges effectively and help to restore the Indian democratic system healthier and more sustainable.

Types of Democracy

Generally, the practice of democracy in ancient Greece was known as the 'City state system'. In this system, People exercised their power of governance. Hence, it can be said that it was a system of government by the whole people of a democratic country. In ancient Greece, the system of 'City State', democracy is rule and control by qualified persons and citizens of the country. In other words, Democracy or the people's rule was under the control of governance by the citizens. Democracy can be classified into two types. Such as - Direct Democracy and Indirect Democracy. For the first time, the direct democracy system was practiced in ancient Greece. In the system of direct democracy, the peoples of the country assemble together for the enactment of laws required for governance and they implement these rules too. Citizens were also engaged directly in the judicial process of the country. Citizens themselves used to perform these duties as per the provision of democracy. In a nutshell, it can be said that citizens have the power to participate directly in the process of governance as well as in the decision-making process of the country. Switzerland is one of the best examples of direct democracy in the world. Another type of democracy is Indirect Democracy. In this type of democracy, citizens indirectly participate in the

decision-making process of the country through their representatives. In the present society, most of the countries of the world accepted indirect democracy as the best form of democracy because of the large size and vast populations. As this system is by the representatives, it is also known representative democracy. The country like India is the best example of indirect democracy and also considered as the largest democracy in the world. In India, due to large populations and vastness of the country, People elect their representatives at the centre, state and local levels in India.

Challenges to Democracy in India:

Democracy as a form of government faces many emerging challenges. The following are some important challenges to democracy.

1. The Criminalisation of Politics - The increasing number of Criminalisation of politics is one of the major threats to the working of democracy. Generally, it means the direct entry of criminals into the political parties & legislature through elections and the use of criminal methods and tactics to influence the political processes. It makes democracy more disorder & disrupted because here lawbreakers become lawmakers. So, there is the possibility of the breakdown of law and order in the society as well as in the functioning of the democratic machinery. Many political parties in India involved with the gangs of criminals for gaining political power or for their self-interest. Due to the Criminalisation of politics, there has been a steady erosion of democratic values in the society. In the 1997 election in Bihar, as many as 67 politicians with criminal backgrounds were elected who were Janata Party members (Sarmah, et.al. 2004). This affects the functioning of Indian democracy adversely in modern India.
2. Casteism - Casteism is another threat to the working of Indian democracy. India has a caste-based society that is peculiar in nature. The democracy of India has witnessed the caste-based politics; caste based voting patten & caste-based wars also. In India, the caste system affecting the fundamental rights of an individual's to live or to grow which is the essence of democracy. In Indian society, the caste system affects democracy at the societal & political levels.
3. Illiteracy- This is another barrier in the way of functioning of democracy. They have a lack of consciousness about the functioning of the government machinery which is dangerous to democracy. In a country like India, both democracy and illiteracy cannot move together. It is because the democratic system of governance can be enriched in such a society where there is rule of law, the provision of equality. Democracy requires competent leadership, but the ignorant and Illiteracy people cannot choose the right people as their ruler. They also cannot understand the basics of democratic government. As a result, the weak structure of the democratic institutions of an ignorant or illiterate society cannot promote a healthy democracy in a dynamics way.
4. Terrorism- Terrorism is another emerging challenge to the working of democracy. It undermines democratic governments & kills innocent people. In a democratic country like India, terrorism generates distort public debates, discredit moderates, empower political extremes, and polarize societies. Now, it is a great

barrier to the national & international level. The actors like governments, international institutions, and civil society facing terrorist violence and mitigate which are the most dangerous political effects not only in India but also throughout the world. After 9/11, the USA declared that terrorism is the enemy of the world. India has been facing terrorist problem for many years in Jammu & Kashmir. Terrorist Attack in Indian Parliament (2001) TajHotel (2008), Pathankot (2016), and Pulwama (2019) are some of the burning examples which threatened the democratic governance in India.

5. **Corruption-** Political corruption is another barrier in the working of democracy. It undermines the legitimacy of the government, democratic values, and good governance. Political leaders use political power to collect an illegal wealth of the country. In a country like India, corruption has direct effects on politics, administration and the institutions. Corruption in the decision-making process reduces faith and accountability in public policy making; it compromises the rule of law in the judiciary and inefficient provision of service in public administration. Corruption may have a direct impact on the economy of the county.

Necessary Pre-Conditions for Democracy

In order to strengthen democracy in the world in general and India in particular, the following are some necessary pre-conditions required for the successful working of democracy.

1. **Democracy & Political Freedom:** - The first and foremost pre-conditions required for democracy is political freedom. It provides political preferences fully and freely to each and every citizens of the democratic country. This is the fundamental right of people to organize them politically, though which they can exercise political preferences. In a country like India, people have the right to vote, right to contest elections and further have the right to exercise political power. In India, Political freedom also empowers the citizens to form associations and to criticize the government.
2. **Democracy & Political Consciousness:** - The Second important pre-conditions required for successful democracy is Political Consciousness. Generally, Political Consciousness means people's awareness of state and politics. It includes healthy competitions, tolerance, clear perceptions and consensus towards governments, political institutions, state, and politics. However, political consciousness is essential for the smooth functioning of democracy.
3. **Democracy & Political Education:** - Political Education is another successful ingredient required for democracy. It is also an important factor that influences the political consciousness. It is the best platform where Citizens have the right to know the ideas and values of democracy. Political education can enhance people's abilities to constructive criticism against the government so as to help them to arrive at the right decision in the decision making of the government. It should be part of the education system. By political education, citizens either can become effective leaders of tomorrow or can choose their leader wisely without getting influenced by the unethical factors.
4. **Democracy & Economic and Social Security:** - The sixth important ingredients for successful working democracy are economic and social security. For exercising political rights properly, Economic Freedom is very essential. It helps to eradicate poverty and provides security towards the availability of opportunities to participate in the production process in a fair manner. To ensure economic freedom for each and every section of the society, the concentration of wealth amongst the few and the eradication of inequality are very much required.
5. **Democracy & Sound Party System:** - Political Parties is another ingredient necessary for the successful working of democracy. One of the important functions of Political parties is to organize public opinion and create a situation conducive to policy decisions. It runs the governmental functions effectively with formations of the government. In order to make democracy more successful, a healthy and influential opposition party is necessary to keeps a check the ruling government. Thus, a sound and healthy party system are essential for the smooth running of the democratic setup in India.
6. **Democracy & Independence of Media:** - The fourth important pre-conditions required for the successful working of democracy is the Independence of Media. According to Edmund Burke, Media is the Fourth Pillar of Democracy. It plays an important and pivotal role in conveying the functioning of the government. It works as the watchdog of democracy. Media also promotes democratic ideas to the public and exposes the activities of corruption, nepotism, terrorism, etc. So, it is necessary to underline that an independent, Free and impartial media is essential in forming and expressing public opinion.
7. **Democracy & Decentralization of Power:** - The seventh pre-condition necessary for the successful working of democracy is the decentralization of power. To run the democratic system of governance, the power of the government must be decentralized among each and every section of the society. Democracy is the best platform for the decentralization of power preferences. With the introduction of the local self-government by the 73rd constitutional amendment Act, 1992, people directly take interest in the administration and give full support to the government. Democracy ensures greater participation of the people in governance through the Panchayatiraj system. As De Tocqueville rightly said that, "Local institutions constitute the strength of the free nation. A nation may establish a system of free government but without municipal institutions, it can have the spirit of liberty". The development of India can be achieved through the development of the village. Village Panchayat should be empowered with more autonomous powers for the smooth working of democracy.
8. **Democracy & Free and Independent Elections:** - The seventh ingredient necessary for the successful working of democracy is the Free and independent elections in India. For the smooth working of the democracy, independent election machinery is essential which conducts the elections of both union and state legislatures. Article 324 of the Indian constitution provides an independent election commission which designed with constitutional standing for this purpose. To ensure a healthy democracy, electoral reforms, as well as the electoral laws, must be formulated

throughout the country. As it is the fact that the right to vote is an important component of democracy. Thus, an independent, impartial and periodical elections help in establishing the faith of the people and it also respects the opinion of the people.

Possible Suggestions

The following are some necessary suggestions for the successful functioning of Indian democracy

1. It is important to remember that the electorate is the heart of democracy. The electorate should be imparted with the awareness of political consciousness. It means people have the ability to know or aware of their rights and duties. They must be conscious about their rights and privileges by organizing seminars, workshops, conferences, etc. at the grassroots level.
2. In India's democratic system, Proper education should be imparted to the illiterate people so that they can vote sensibly to their respective candidates. Lack of consciousness is dangerous to democracy. So, in India, this defect can be remedied by providing political education and wide dissemination of knowledge. If the people were not conscious of their political problems, then the system of democratic governance will not be successful.
3. NGO's & government institutions should always work cooperatively for the betterment of the country. They must promote initiatives for the economic and social development of the country.
4. Media, the fourth pillar of democracy should play an active role by bringing about true facts and maintaining the true spirit of democracy. Independence of media must be entrusted in India which can locate the true facts of the society to the government.
5. Politicians play a vital role in maintaining democracy. They must have the spirit of democracy & mind of serving the country as a servant, not as the master of the country. They should do work for the development of the country and should follow the idea of service to the community. The politician can do politics on the basis of issues, not on the basis of caste, religion or communal politics in India. They have to play such a role in the country that the true spirit of democracy must be revived and reconfigured for the smooth running of democracy.
6. The leader of the country should have good moral values and integrity. It is the supreme duty of the citizens to choose their leader on the basis of the conduct and character. The leader should have an intelligent understanding of the management of public affairs. They must provide justice and unselfish devotion to the public interest. The leaders should be role models for the youths. Thus, the success of democracy depends upon the high moral standard of the people as well as the government.
7. The Directive Principles of State Principles (DPSP) which are mentioned in Part IV of the Indian constitution should be made justiciable rights just like fundamental rights of part III of the Indian Constitution. The DPSP should always be for the social and economic development of the people of India.
8. Legislatures, Executive and Judiciary, the three pillars of democracy respectively should work collectively by keeping an eye on the ongoing affairs in the country.

These institutions should always act in maintaining the true spirit of democracy & try to keep pace with the changing situation of the country.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it can be said that though India is considered as one of the largest democracy in the world, but in practice, there are various emerging challenges or issues that are responsible for creating obstacles in the smooth functioning of the democratic republic of India. However, it is a matter of discussion that despite the elapse of seventy-two years of independence since 1947, there is a lot of illiteracy, corruption, terrorist and Maoist activities in India which threatened the backbone of democratic governance. In the modern world, every democracy has faced many economic, social, religious and political problems. These problems can be solved by the cooperation of the people. Further, a democracy can flourish only if there is no big gap between the thinking of the people and of the government & when there is a spirit of cooperation between them. Due to the corruption and self-interest of the politicians, the faiths of the voters have diminished towards democracy. Though, we are the members of the largest democratic country of the world which ensures equal rights and duties to its citizens. So, it is the supreme duty of the politicians, governments and the peoples to make the collective efforts & actively participate in the functioning of the government and make their country perfect. The Right to Information Act must be properly implemented throughout the country and acts should serve as a watchdog against the abuse of democratic principles in India. The challenges to democracy may be tackled by the way of political consciousness and educating the peoples about the democratic right, duties and values.

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