

# CONCEPT OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY AND THE EMERGING CHALLENGES TO ITS DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

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**Abstract:** We are all familiar with the idea that democracy is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Today, the most common form of democracy is representative democracy, in which citizens elect officials to make political decisions, formulate laws, and administer programmes for the public good. Since independence, India has managed to stay on the democratic path in a way unprecedented among states freed from colonialism. Recently, however, the dominance of muscle power of the political candidates, bypassing of democratic deliberations, attacks on religious minorities, frequent riots, and maladministration of the independent institutions, in addition to the pre-existing challenges such as education, economic backwardness, regionalism, corruption- has given rise to claims that India's democracy is in grave danger. However, equality, good governance, education, decentralization of power, civil society participation can remove these threats to have better democratic setup in India.

In this paper, it has been attempted to study and analyse the existing democratic setup in India and suggest necessary reforms in order to ensure a true democracy in India

**Keywords:** Democracy, Challenges, Governance, Corruption, Communalism.

## Introduction

Democracy is a Greek invention, where the ultimate authority of governance is vested in the common people to conform to the will of the people and to serve the interest of its people. First time practiced in ancient Greek city Athens. In the late 20th century, democracy triumphed over all other major ideological systems. The vigorous rise of democracy has continued ever since and today there are over 167 self-proclaimed democratic countries around the world The Democratic Index 2019.

Successful democracy is a holistic idea. It encompasses both procedural and substantive aspects. Procedural aspects such as political equality, effective institutions, free and fair elections, legislative assemblies, constitutional governments, and good voter turnouts, while, substantive aspects comprises socio-economic equality of citizens, tolerance for different opinions, ruler accountability, respect for the rules, and a strong political engagement. Both aspects are complementary and dependent. They reinforce one another and also interfere with one another. Socio-economic inequality will interfere with the achievement of political equality. Thus, successful functioning of procedural aspects of democracy requires aspects of substantive democracy.

India is not only the largest democracy in the world, it is also considered to be a strong one, characterized by a good relationship between the electors and the electorates. India runs on five democratic principles including sovereign, secular, socialist and democratic and republic. India was declared a democratic nation after it attained freedom from the colonial rule of the british in 1947. Not only is the largest, Indian democracy also considered to be one of the most successful ones. Subrata Kumar Mitra explains 'India is a modern state with secure boundaries, sovereign control over domestic politics and with international recognition.'<sup>3</sup> But India is also a quite new state; it became free from colonialists quite late in history, and is still carrying a colonial heritage; it wants to become more independent.

Democracy is not an absolute state but an evolving process, anywhere in the world. India is a young democracy, stumbling along the path to recognition of majority rule as something altogether distinct from codified balance between individual and group rights, including minority rights.

Practice of democracy is in everybody's interest: history shows that strong, mature democracies have never instigated war of aggression against other countries. India as a democratic country had faced and is facing array of challenges that help to provide lessons for most countries in the world. It is the largest democracy in the world, in which elections takes a week to administer, twenty two official languages are spoken, and the population is marked by deep religious, economic, social, and cultural divisions. India is known to have a successful democratic system. However, there are certain loopholes and challenges which are eroding the faith of its citizens that need to be worked on such as corruption, poor sanitation, communal riots, law and order, economic reforms, good governance, protection of human rights, women's and children rights, protection of freedom guaranteed under the Constitution of India, frequent dharnas, strikes walkouts, etc. Among other things, the democratic government must work on eliminating poverty, illiteracy, communalism, gender bias and caste based discrimination in order to ensure democracy in true sense.

This research work concentrates on the metamorphosis of the challenges deepening in the Indian democratic system since independence. This can help us to understand the problems, prospects and consequences of the centralizing tendencies which is affecting the prospect of India on the domestic and at the world level.

## Objectives of the study:

The present research proposes to work for the fulfillment of the present following objectives.

1. To focus on the present challenges of Indian democratic system;
2. To identify the components necessary for the effective

practice of democracy;

3. To engage in an authentic process of evaluating the practice of democracy in order to chart out a course for future improvements.

#### **Methodology:**

The proposed research is based on secondary data. It will consider the major political, economic and social relations happened within the nation. The proposed study is theoretical, historical, descriptive, exploratory and interpretative in nature. It is exploratory in nature in the sense that it examines the recent furor created by the policies and decisions of the government and its impact on the citizens. This research has a deep and abiding concern and contemplation on the healthy relations between the electors and electorates. This method also attempts to examine the deep rooted reasons behind the political and cultural reasons to curb some of the rights as contemplated by the Indian Constitution.

#### **Discussion:**

No political system works in vacuum. Every political system has to work in particular and historical factors of the concerned. It is no fact that every political system is conditioned by the environment in which it operates. Indian democracy cannot be an exception to this rule and it is undoubtedly conditioned by a number of social and economic factors. The challenges for Indian democracy have been numerous, and often of extraordinary magnitude. Yet India has so far defied prediction of the end of its democracy. The country has managed to muddle through by applying innovative, responsive and novel strategies that moved the country forward- without becoming some kind of hybrid state or simply an authoritarian one. However, more recently it seems that something has gone wrong with the democratic project. The most significant break in the country's democratic trajectory came during the Emergency (1975-77) 'Emergency turned democracy into constitutional dictatorship'. The constitutional provisions were used to turn democracy into constitutional dictatorship by Mrs Indira Gandhi, her 18-month-long suspension of democracy was comprehensive. In 1976 the liberal democracy index<sup>3</sup> was down to 0.28, effectively turning India into an authoritarian state. In 1977, however, Ms Gandhi kept her promise to restore democracy, and an impressive recovery took place.

Now Democracy is at deflection point as considered by various litterateur, politicians and experts. Different measures are now being taken to facilitate an environment of good governance in which mankind can flourish without any restriction but still a lot more has to be done in the context of frequent threats to the Indian democratic system.

Some of the challenging issue which has a paramount significance in the Indian democratic system has been mentioned below:

#### **Criminalization of politics:**

Data from the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) indicates that 179 out of the 543 elected MPs in the 16th Lok Sabha have some kind of criminal case pending against them. In almost years, politicians indulge in violence and take refuge in other unhealthy, undemocratic methods to win elections. Undoubtedly, this is not a healthy trend in

politics and there is an urgent need to apply serious check on such tendencies. Criminals have more chance of winning, due to muscle and money power they have at their helm. Election Commission of India has given limited powers to legislate on election related laws. Thus, causing the greatest danger Indian democracy faces today.

#### **Kashmir Article 370:**

After the recent revocation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution (which ended J&K's autonomy and is reorganised into two Union Territories) a strong opinion has emerged regarding the human rights in Jammu & Kashmir and the detention of majority of leaders of J&K under the Public Safety Act marks a new, dangerous low in the overreach of state power to curtail liberty in Kashmir. The manner in which they have been subject to detention is creating a widespread resentment against the democratic theme of India, whether justifiable or not. A genuine concern about human rights and civil liberties whether it is the suspension of civil liberties, the detention of political figures, the information blackout that existed is linked with the relationship it holds with the globalized world.

#### **Economic backwardness:**

Equal economic development for its all classes of society and all parts of country is not being done in India, one of the main reasons for the crippling of Indian democracy. Economic backwardness in many parts of India has resulted in poverty, under nutrition, lack of proper education, health awareness and facilities of development. In such circumstances, a citizen is not and cannot be expected to be able to participate in the process of democratic governance of the country. So, a large sector of Indian public remains out of democratic process and so nation is not running as a true democracy, due to economic backwardness. If without any influence or compulsion every citizen can take part in process of democracy, without any about threat and with well received information and knowledge, only then it can be expected to run a democracy.

#### **Media Freedom at Risk:**

Media plays an important and pivotal role in conveying the functioning of the government and democratic ideas to the public and exposes the activities of corruption, nepotism, terrorism etc. Free and impartial media help in forming and expressing opinion. There is, however, surge in press freedom violations that include police violence against journalists, ambushes by political activists, and attacks instigated by criminal groups or corrupt local officials.

The 2020 World Press Freedom Index<sup>4</sup> published by Reporters Without Borders ranks India 142nd of 180 countries- worse than Nepal (112nd), Afghanistan (122nd), and Myanmar (139th).

#### **Education:**

Education enables citizen to participate in elections and makes them conscious of the principles of liberty, equality of all and can be aware of various issues, problems, demands, and interest in the country. But it remains as a matter of grave concern for the successful functioning of democracy since independence. We have by far achieved political democracy but the dream to achieve social and economic democracy is still a distant vision. For the successful democracy, Indian education should not be

neglected and be given a prominent place to ensure a true democracy.

### **Enactment of Citizenship Amendment Act:**

The recently enacted Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) has caused a great deal of political upheaval in India. Though, designed to grant fast track Indian citizenship to certain minorities who faced persecution on the grounds of religion in Pakistan, Afghanistan or Bangladesh, it has widely been perceived as a stunt by the government of India in an attempt to strip Indian Muslims of their citizenship rights. The CAA enactment has caused countrywide anguish and social unrest with widespread protest all over the country, in which the central argument was that the CAA violates the secular spirit of the Indian Constitution.

### **Governance Reforms:**

The performance of public administration in India has become very poor feasibly for the reasons like corruption, inefficiencies, political interference and irresponsiveness. However, sincere officers are there but very few, and they and their ideologies are also not safe in this system. Regarding the judiciary, India follows the concept of independent judiciary wherein courts are not subjected to improper influence from the other branches of government in delivering impartial, just, and equitable justice. However, today, the regular courts are bound by numerous inefficiencies i.e., the pendency of cases, corruption and lack of transparency. Hence, the judiciary shall have to take care of the arrears of cases which have mounted up till now and get it eradicate at the earliest.

### **Regionalism:**

It is considered to be one of the significant challenges to the democratic system which gave rise to many popular demands within India. Regionalism or love for one's area, despite Indian tradition of successful federal rule over the year since independence, still raises its head in different parts of the country. The voice for demand of more states has become more prominent in recent times, such as agitation for Gorkhaland, revival of Khalistan, Bodoland, Nagalim agitations, etc.

In addition to this, external forces also create hindrances for the democratic setup. The tension in the North Eastern States of India is due to the interference of neighboring countries. China's claim on some portion of Arunachal Pradesh on LAC threatens the territorial integrity of India, Nepal's claim on the Kalapani Territory part of pithoragarh district in the Uttarakhand state, the Tamil issue in Sri Lanka creates disruptive forces in India, the alleged Pakistan hand in Khalistan movement in the past also has a say in weakening the Indian federation.

Rampant corruption, red-tapism, delays in administration of justice, abuse or obstruction of public authority, the proliferation of money and muscle power in Indian politics and denial of rights as enshrined in the constitution are weakening the foundation of democracy. Poverty, fragile healthcare system, division of society on communal lines, over population, unemployment is prevalent in most parts of India, which not only hampering national progress but also reflecting democracy's shortcomings.

India, a society that draws strengths from its diversity should be keen to understand the problem its society is facing. Democracy has come to mean over and above periodic elections- though nothing less. It means the permanent public scrutiny and restraint of power, attention to judicial integrity and decentralization of power wherever it is exercised in the domestic and cross border fields of government and civil society. The historic struggle for one person, one vote is over. In the new age of monitory democracy, election still count, but parties and parliament now have to compete with thousands of monitory organizations and networks that try to keep power on its toes. The old meaning of democracy as the periodic election of representative based on the rule of one person, one vote, is being replaced by democracy guided by a different and more complex rule: one person, many votes, many interests, and many representatives both at home and abroad.

As the democracy fails the economy fails and these symptoms which reflects the challenges it is bypassing shall be resolved to strengthen the citizen's trust within the Indian democratic system and to boost the relationship it has molded with various nations. Democracy is not only a classification of government or regulating the voting system once in every five-year, it includes the rights that ought to be claimed in the everyday lives of the citizen. The functions and visibility of democracy in a country can hence be understood by letting the people speak about their lives and ambitions. Different groups do not share the same knowledge or the same view of democracy in a multicultural society. Development of democracy comes hand in hand with development in other areas i.e., reduction of poverty, improving education system, performing socially relevant tasks and striving for equality. Requirements of people can be known only if full democratic governance is implemented; Democratic nation pays equal attention to every requirement of all sectors of society or citizens, irrespective of their level, number and strength. After satisfying all basic requirements only development can be achieved.

In spite of the country's long commitment to democracy and repeated peaceful transition of power, Indian democracy is still vulnerable with number of soft spots.

### **Conclusion:**

It can be concluded that though India is considered as one of the largest democracy in the world, but in reality there are various challenges that are responsible for creating obstruction in the true functioning of democratic republic of India.

The greatest drawback of Indian democracy is illiteracy and poverty of the masses, besides this, caste ridden society has also given a blow to the healthy democratic system. Independence of agencies such as CBI, Election Commission etc, remains in paper only (these agencies on their parts have miserably failed in addressing their concerned issues). Horse trading, political defections, issue of discretionary power of governors in case of hung assembly, post-poll alliance; all is seen as betrayal of trust of the voters. There is an urgent need to frame rules which would curb the menace of anti-defections, illiteracy, socio-economic inequalities, etc. Though law plays an important role in political reformation and may help to prevent wrong

practices and encourage good ones. But mere legal changes alone do not help as the changes in laws may sometimes prove counterproductive and may result into negative impact on society. Therefore, besides good laws, the political ruling and the opposition must work in with true parliamentary spirit towards meeting these challenges and hence restoring the true democracy in India.

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