

A theory and practice of democracy: An Indian experience

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Abstract

Today democracy is appreciated by all over the world but still there are several challenges to democracy. It is defined as a form of government and way of life. Though some supported the totalitarian type of government have also pretended to appreciate democracy. In diversity country like India mere political democracy is meaningless until and unless economic and social democracy. Ours is the greatest democratic country but still millions of people are struggling for their daily basic needs. In this theoretical research work, the researcher tries to analyses the meaning and nature of democracy and the major challenges before e democracy in the Indian context.

Keywords: Democracy, Social Democracy, Government, People's power, Accountability

Introduction

Democracy is a very old form of government & so its theory dates back to the days of the Greeks who identified it with 'people's power' (Pericles) or a system in which 'rules are accountable to the people for what they do therein' (Herodotus). Today Democracy is not only considered a form of government but it is a way of life. It is the best form of government for the reason that it ensures popular participation. It is the only government that stands on the will of the people & and stimulates them to take part in the political affairs of the country. If we discuss on moral ground, Democracy inculcates in them the feelings of hand work, it sharpens their sense of responsibility & patriotism. Though Democracy has been considered one of the best government models, it was not a universal in nature until the mid-twentieth century only after representative democracy comes into its own with universal adult suffrage.

India, as soon as got independence from Britten in 1947, adapted the new constitution in 1950, under this constitution the representative democracy has been emerged. India is a country with multi-cultural, religious, linguistic & social structure. Due to these diversities there are numerous challenges before Democracy in India, These challenges can be discussed latterly, now we can discuss the meaning of Democracy.

Meaning of Democracy

Democracy may be defined as a system with free, fair and frequent elections, universal suffrage & that guarantees certain freedoms and rights to its citizen. In 19th century, the highly respected human being throughout the world Abraham Lincoln called it 'government of the people, by the people, and for the people'. Great liberals like John Locke and Edmund Burke developed the same theory. Joseph Schumpeter defined it as 'Democracy is a political method or an institutional arrangement for arriving at political, legislative or administrative decisions by vesting in certain individuals the power to decide on all matters as a consequence of their successful pursuit of the people's vote'. Hence Democracy is a

system in which sovereign power resides in the people and the government functions for the good or welfare of them. The utilitarian defined it as 'a greatest good of the greatest number'. John Stuart Mill the greatest utilitarian did the same on the basis of his moral or ethical argument. To Rousseau democracy alone ensures prevalence of the 'general will'. Influenced by the idealistic interpretations of Rousseau, T.H. Green says that 'will, not force, is the basis of the state' that is why Greek philosophers developed the 'organic nature of the state' they thought that there is no difference between the individual & state. For them state should always think about the all-round development of the individual. We can see this kind of philosophical attachment only in democracy.

Major challenges to democracy in India

The Greek philosopher Plato (360 BC) argues that democracy is inferior to various forms of monarchy, aristocracy, and even oligarchy, on the grounds that democracy tends to undermine the expertise that is necessary to properly governed Societies. In a democracy, Most of the people including legislators do not have the kinds of knowledge that enable them to think well about the difficult issues that politics involves. This lack of political knowledge certainly will impact adversely on the functioning of the government. In democracy politicians simply concern themselves with gaining more power by mobilizing citizens. The only way in which to do this is by appealing to emotionally charged and highly divisive issues. Hence they sow the seeds of conflict among irresponsible citizens (Thomas Christiano 2012).

Illiteracy

Education is necessary for making the citizenry alert and capable of discharging their duties and responsibilities efficiently & effectively. Without an educated citizenry democracy cannot be a success and will fail to give its rich dividends. The National policy on Education (NPE) 1986 & the Revised NPE, 1992 have rightly reiterated, 'India's political and social life is passing through a phase which poses the danger of erosion to long accepted values. The

goals of secularism, socialism, democracy and professional ethics are coming under increasing strain'. The National policies have emphasized common citizenship and democratic values in education. A diversitic country like India must focus on the value based education. The contemporary Indian youths are attracted from the self-centered cultured. Even today the marginalized groups, scheduled casts/tribe, and minorities' people especially women population are not able to get minimum education. The large country in India, majority of the population without get adequate education, how can they participate in the democratic process? Thus this is the major challenge to democracy in India.

Poverty

According Global Hunger Index Report 2015, though India's Global Hunger Index rank improves to 55 from 63, but fighting hunger remains a challenge. Under nourishment and mortality among children remains alarmingly high. The data of GHIR revealed that one-sixth of the Indian population is under nourished, 190 million people in India go hungry daily, 30% of children in India aged below 5 are under weight, 3000 children in India die daily from poor diet- related illness. 24% of deaths of children aged below five global are in India, 30% of global neo-natal deaths are in India. Hence India has made some progress in reducing poverty level, but still ranks behind neighboring Nepal and Sri-Lanka on the Global Hunger Index. (In wall street journal in its Feb 5, 2015 edition Vibhuthi Agarwal)

United Nations report in Feb 2015- said that in 2000, India along with 189 member countries of the United Nations charted out an ambitious agenda – the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) – to free millions of people from poverty and hunger by the end of 2015, and to improve access to health and education. But still India remains home to one-fourth of the world's poor & more than one-third of all malnourished children. The UN report pointed out that India should achieve its target. The report said that 59.4% households in rural India and 88% in urban India had no toilet facilities.

Angus Deaton, the Scottish- American Princeton professor who won the Economics Nobel in 2015 is a strong critic of India's poverty line expressed his views that "Indian poverty is measured using a series of household surveys run by India's National sample survey (NSS). The results of these surveys have been subject to intense debate in recent years. There are also significant questions about the appropriateness of the poverty lines used by the Government of India. Finally, the Indian consumer price indexes used in the poverty calculations have also been questioned". (The Times of India Business Oct, 13 2015).

Inequality

Though article 14 of the constitution has made clear that no person can be denied his rightful possession just on the basis of caste, color, place of birth, religion, gender etc. Can we abolish this cast system in our nation? Untouchability has been practicing one or the other way. In a civilized country like India, centuries old Indian cast system still takes its toll from time-to-time. In its judgment in a state of Uttar Pradesh V Ram Sajiwan in 2010, the Apex court held that it is absolutely

imperative to abolish cast system as expeditiously as possible for the smooth functioning of rule of law & democracy in India.

Gender based inequality similar to that of caste based on equality also dates back to Vedic ages. Even today the Indian society thinks that the realm of politics, public service or running a business firm are all considered just means of men because they are intelligent. The majority of the women folk more particularly in rural India have not been able to break out of the patriarchal system of society.

If we really want to build meaningful democratically institutions, provisions for a better political representation of women are needed to address today's blatant male domination of many democratic institutions, from parliament to panchayat. There is also much scope for more equitable electoral rules, better safeguards against human rights violations, more decentralized governance, and so on.

Communalism

Communalism advocates complete control of the whole system by community. It advocates the supremacy of one religion over all other religious communities. In recent times communalism has taken center stage in making and unmaking of government in most parts of the world. The active role of religion in politics shaping of political parties has emerged as a major threat to democracy. The 'Divide and rule policy' of the Britishers is being practiced by the Indian politicians by develop communal feelings by creating situations to support their Vested interests. The communal clashes in India were nothing new as they existed since pre-independence days, In 1909, The famous Morley - Minto Reforms was enacted by the British parliament. This enactment sowed the communal feelings among Hindus & Muslims by divide & rule policy of the Britishers. In post-independence era Indian politicians developed the communal feelings among people to gain the political power. Today communal ideals can be witnessed in all elections from pancayat to parliament. There should be secularist nature for all political parties to develop the strong democracy in the multi-religious country like India.

Corruption

Our country is inherently dysfunctional situation due to the wide spread corruption. There is no news in the Newspapers and the T V News channels without the single corruption scandals every day. US \$ 30 billion lost to government coffers in coal scans, US \$ 25 billion forfeited in underpriced telecom auctions, and US \$ 10 billions of smuggled conflict diamonds mark some of the bigger scandals in recent times.

In 1975, writer Suresh Kohli argued that corruption was a 'ritual of India'. Jose Ugaz, chairman of the Transparency International asserted that "The 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index clearly shows that corruption remains a blight around the world. But 2015 was also a year when people again took to the streets to protest corruption. People across the global send a strong signal to those in power; it is time to tackle grand corruption.

In India, at least 120 of India's 523 members of parliament face criminal charges, at least 330 elected members of India's 4,050 Members of Legislative Assembly are defendants in ongoing rape cases in 2013. In 2016 India was ranked 76th out

of 168 countries in Transparency International's corruption perceptions Index. It is important to note that the small countries like Lithuania placed with 32, Latvia with 40, Romania with 58 our own neighbor Bhutan placed with 27.

In inaugural speech in the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Central Vigilance Commission our Hon 'ble president Sri Pranab Mukharji asserted that "there has been no letup in our national efforts to root out corruption, we have to acknowledge our limited success in this regard. Corruption remains a major stumbling block in the progress of our nation. It has increased transaction costs reduced efficiency of public services, distorted decision making processes and undermined the moral fiber of our society corruption has rein forced inequities and limited access to public service by the common man, especially the poor".

Indian democracy in future

A keen political science student cannot agree with democracy is nearly a form of government, rather than 'democracy means much more than democratic government, it is a way of life, it is closely related to a 'good society'. If we look into Dr. Ambedkar's conception of democracy is that it is geared to social transformation and human progress. Dr. Ambedkar defined democracy as 'a method of government where by revolutionary changes in the economic & social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed'. Hence without achieving social & economic development of the people, we cannot say ours is the democratic country. So political democracy alone could not be expected to go very far. Dr. B.R Ambedkar expressed in constituent Assembly on the 26th January 1950. "We are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In political we will have equality and in social & economic life we will have inequality..... How long shall we continue to live this life of contradiction, how long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril" If we really want to strengthen the democracy. We must strengthen the better representation of women in politics, wider opportunities for people's involvement in local governance. Spread of education among disadvantaged section of the society, the eradication of corruption, and the end of hunger these are all the urgent reforms to be taken.

Conclusion

In India there are still a number of challenges for democracy & its consolidation. Though we have adopted the federal form of government, the central government is dominating over the state governments. The ruling party in power at the center is always misusing the Article 356 of the constitution, the central government has taken over state's administration, and elections have been suspended. Citizens have been denied their basic civil and political rights, criminalization in politics, corruption, violation of the election code of conduct there are some demerits which are destabilizing our democratic Society. We have completed 65 years of independence our democracy is still in infant stage. The modern concept of democracy not only covered the political aspect, it large equal emphasis on its social and economic dimensions. That is socialist and democracy not merely means political power in the hands of

the people, it also means absence of class distinctions & exploitation of any kind. It desired social equality ensuring dignity of labour and worth of the individual. In the economic sphere it means removal of all gigantic social evils like unemployment, disease, starvation, squalor, poverty and on like, we can conclude with the Lenin's realistic Assertion "political liberty without economic liberty is a sham".

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