



India's democracy from a historical perspective

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Abstract:

The concept of democracy in India originated in the west. The initial idea of democracy is thought to have originated in Greek culture. Aside from the diversity and cultural ambiguity that exist in this nation, India has actually democratised the concept of democracy. People in contemporary India continue to support democracy, which is based on the tenets that each person should participate in decision-making, democratic acts are under everyone's control and direction, and each person needs a democratic environment to coexist with others. As a result, contemporary India marks a transition from an empire to a sovereign independent India, where a dynamic institutional framework is strongly framed within constitutional supremacy. There is a fundamental transition occurring in contemporary democratic India, where the character of democracy is shifting away from being stable and towards the realm of autocracy. As a result, in some of the world's most developed democracies, democracy is in peril. India's democracy has currently lost its shape. The tyrants and undemocratic rulers are attempting to define democracy using their own terminology. They created the most perplexing theory in India. In order to visualise the current democracy in the context of India, an attempt has been made to define and debate the notion of democracy in this article. It also examines democracy's traits and attributes. It looks at how the concept of democracy was widely democratised by India's vigorous exercise of democracy. It will discuss the nature of democracy as it is practised in modern India towards the conclusion. This essay mostly draws on secondary sources, including books, magazines, newspapers, and journals.

Keywords: India, democracy, successful, system, form of government

1. Introduction

Who should rule has been a question ever since the cosmos began? 'People should govern' has also likely gained widespread acceptance as a reaction. Different systems of government, such as authoritarian, aristocratic, autocratic, monarchical, oligarchy, feudalism, etc., have been used to rule the populace in illustrious civilizations. Nevertheless, the history of democracy in politics may be traced back to the Greeks. The name "democracy" also has its roots in the ancient Greek word "Kratos," which denotes "power" or "rule," and "Demos," which stands for "the people" or "the many." As a result, democracy is defined as "rule by the people" or "rule by the many." In other terms, we might say that democracy is fundamentally a form of government in which the people control the political system either directly or through their regularly chosen representatives. Therefore, in this sense, it can be claimed that in a democratic republic like India, the people themselves hold the true authority.

Democracy has consistently been the most admired and revered type of political system in the world throughout recorded history. The preparation of the ground for the establishment of the roots of democracy on the other hand came about at the same time that the globe was considering authoritarianism as the guiding philosophy and the ability to mobilise the populace to achieve national goals and interests. As a result, democracy has supplanted authoritarianism and prospered in the current socioeconomic circumstances. At its inception, democracy had admirable goals, such as peace, harmony, development, freedom from injustice, equality, and a just society. However, when we discussed the attributes of democracy, including the adult franchise, an impartial judiciary, representative government, freedom of the press, fair electoral procedures, the presence of two or more political parties, and the supremacy of the constitution, it emanated and led people to believe that we are in a system where democracy is actually present and functions as intended. This finding implies that democracy is solely a political idea due to such practises. However, democracy is more than just a political idea; it is a concept with a wider scope and deeper significance.



Democracy: A Broader concept

To put it more broadly, democracy is "...not only a form of government but a type of society and a manner of life which is in harmony with that type," according to English economic historian Richard Henry Tawney. Therefore, in this sense, democracy is not just a theory for actual politics, but also a controlling force in all spheres of existence. The democratic normative part of democracy should not be divorced from democratic morals, democratic thought, and democratic behaviour of every individual.

Democracy: A narrow concept

Democracy was only understood as a political system in ancient Greek culture. Democracy's main concerns in the 17th and 18th centuries were idealised ideas. Democracy lacks goals and values in the modern world, particularly since the Second World War. In other words, many academics have emphasised that democracy only includes a political component.

In this regard, a number of distinguished academics, including John Austin, James Bryce, A.V. Dicey, John Seely, and A.L. Lowell, are among those who have elucidated the idea of democracy as primarily a system of government.

Although democracy has a history that dates back to the ancient Greeks, political intellectuals did not adopt it until the 19th century. Now, it seems as though every group has been excitedly extolling the merits of democracy, including liberals, communists, anarchists, conservatives, socialists, and even fascists.

Review of Literature

According to Sumit Sarkar (2001), the Indian Council Act of 1861, which for the first time recognised the rights of the peoples of India representing their legislative bodies, marked the beginning of democracy in India, though not in the true "democratic sense" of the British English man or English-educated Indian.

Varma, (2015) Democracy must exist in the minds of regular people; it is not for the benefit of affluent individuals but for the common welfare. Democracy has the potential to eliminate the worst inequities and disparities that exist in every society. But only democratic leaders have the power to make it happen. Robert Michels stated that "leadership is a necessary phenomenon in every form of social life".

Defining democracy

"A form of government in which the supreme power of the state is vested in the hands of the community as a whole," according to Herodotus of Halicarnassus.

Democracy, according to the 2400-year-old Greek philosopher Cleon, is defined as "that which shall be democratic, which shall be of the people, by the people, and for the people." Abraham Lincoln brought back this definition for the contemporary era, stating that "it is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

According to James Bryce, "democracy is that form of government in which the ruling power of state is legally vested in the members of the community as a whole, not in any particular class or classes."

In his essay, Mazzini claims that "Democracy is the government of the best and wisest, for the progress of all and through all."

Democracy is defined precisely by Seeley as "a government in which everyone has a share."

People are the primary source of state authority, according to definitions of democracy. Despite being a majority administration, this one does not completely disregard the interests of minorities. Different academics have given democracy a variety of definitions. It is referred to as a type of society, state, and administration.

Democracy is a type of society where all members are treated equally regardless of their social status or material wealth. It upholds the principles of equality, freedom of speech, fair trials, and

consideration for minorities. Every section of the population is equally represented in the legislature through elections based on adult franchise, according to the definition of democracy as a type of state. Democracy, as a system of government, mandates that citizens participate in politics directly or indirectly through elected officials. According to Wikipedia, a democracy is "a form of government in which the people retain political sovereignty and exercise it either directly or through their elected representatives."

The foundations of democracy

- The people's sovereignty.
- Government that is founded on popular consent.
- Rule of majority.
- Rights of minorities.
- Protection of basic human rights.
- Open and transparent elections.
- Priority before the law.
- The process laid out by the legislation.
- The constitution's checks and balances on power.
- Pluralism in social, economic, and political spheres.
- Tolerance, pragmatism, collaboration, and compromise values.



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Democracy as a concept and how it has changed in the Indian context

The British government is fostering and introducing democracy in contemporary India. The Indian Councils Act of 1909, also known as the Morley-Minto reforms, increased the size of all legislative councils, recognised the elective principle legally, provided for non-official majorities, and increased the councils' authority by allowing them to move and vote on constitutional amendments. Additionally, the Act of 1919 (famously known as the Montagu-Chelmsford reform) restored several democratic aspects including critiquing governmental actions and policies and restoring the public administrative system. The Government of India Act of 1935 was the one key turning point in the development and advancement of democracy in the nation. It established nearly all of the nation's democratic elements. It has introduced a number of noteworthy features, including the transfer of all provincial government departments to the responsible ministers in the administration, the evaluation and preparation of the introduction of diarchy at the union level rather than the provincial level, and the assignment of ministers to the charge of administration for all subjects. (Roy, 2018). It can be said with confidence that India's pre-independence population did not find the idea and concept of democracy strange or foreign. Because democracy and democratic institutions already existed in British India and even before the British arrived in India. As Atul Kohli (2001) suggested, in order to understand the origins of democracy in this nation, a detailed examination of ancient Indian manuscripts is necessary [9]. The idea of a welfare state is discussed in the Kautilyan Arthashastra. The great Indian statesman and philosopher of antiquity made the case that the ruler should derive his happiness from that of the populace. He thinks that everyone should be happy and healthy in all respects. It demonstrates unequivocally that the Greek and Indian conceptions of democracy share many similarities. The Greeks shared the idea that democracy is for the welfare of the populace. Similar to this, the idea of democracy's Indian heritage implies that it is to the benefit and empowerment of the population that democracy is truly and truly understood.

Democracy: India's successful attempt at democratization

The institutions of democracy were ushered in in India on January 26th, 1950, when the world's longest written constitution was framed. The proposal may fail to be implemented in a nation where the literacy rate as of the 1951 census was not more than 18.33 percent, according to proponents of democracy. Poverty was at its height at the same time as illiteracy. Given the

poverty, illiteracy, cultural diversity, language diversity, and religious diversity in such a varied nation, some academics and commentators questioned whether the democracy experiment in India could ever succeed. However, this nation has created the millennium framework for democracy, which has not been used or put into practise in any other nation in the globe. In this context, the most recent instance of Yugoslavia's fragmentation can be seen. Because Yugoslavia failed to successfully democratise the concept of democracy, all of its states are now officially democratic after 25 years [11]. India, on the other hand, has done so. Therefore, India effectively popularised democracy and made it applicable to all people, enabling people to practise it despite hardships and disadvantages.

In fact, India's seventy years of independence have shaped people's faith in and belief in democracy. Without a doubt, this nation's democratic institutions are based on the tenet of democracy. However, the so-called democratic institutions fall well short of guaranteeing everyone's comfort and equality. India fails to eradicate inequality and poverty. In India, more than 2.5 times as many people live below the international poverty line of USD 1.90 per day as do the 86 million people in Nigeria, the country with the second-highest number of impoverished people in the world, according to a World Bank report. According to the World Bank report mentioned above, two classes of people are likely to exist in our nation. Political scientist Gaetano Mosca stated that "two classes of people appear—a class that rules and a class that is ruled." He also added that the ruling class performs all political duties and benefits from all the advantages that come with having power. In this regard, our nation's current political environment is indistinguishable. In actuality, it cannot be argued that a failed system applies in this nation, but it is ironic that the ruling class controls the majority of the nation's wealth and power. Thus, behind the protection of democracy, the wealthiest classes in this nation indulge in their personal interests, while the last citizen of this nation, who is also a member of democracy, is still outside of their comfort zone. In general, history has shown that what separates victory from failure, whether in war or elsewhere. Despite having leaders, the largest democracy in the world lacks or is anticipated to lack democratic leadership. Since leaders create policies and decisions, it is crucial for a democratic society to have leadership that is mature, bold, and selfless. As was previously stated, democracy is a fundamental concept that needs to be held in everyone's mind. A large section of people in this country are living in poverty and deprivation but they still believe in democracy. Despite their active participation and support for change, their objectives still require revision to take on a more tangible form.

Democratic governments are always meant to be open, accommodating, and accountable. A necessary prerequisite for the success of transparency, democracy, and good governance is the right to information (RTI). The RTI Act went into effect in India on June 21, 2005, yet there have been a number of instances when public organisations have failed to reply to requests for a variety of information as a result of the act's inefficient implementation. Due to disparities, there are glaring injustices and distortions. For the weaker and poorer segments of society, there is no fairness in the current democratic system. Minority rights are abused in this way, but they are important in democracies and should not be disregarded, as Franklin Roosevelt reminded us: "No democracy can long survive which does not accept as fundamental to its very existence the recognition of the rights of minorities."

The corruption that exists in our nation is another problem that threatens the fundamental foundation of democracy. India is ranked 79 out of 176 nations in the 2016 Corruption Perceptions Index. India placed 81st out of 180 nations in the corruption perception index in 2017. According to the 2017 Corruption Perception Index, India is among the worst offenders in the Asia Pacific area. India, however, came in at number 78 out of 180 nations in 2018. It has been found that little progress has been done in this area despite the government's constant and unwavering efforts, which can be a violation of the principle of democracy. Jose Ugaz, a board member for

Transparency International, claimed in 2014 that "In too many countries, people are deprived of their most basic needs and go to bed hungry every night due to corruption, while the powerful and corrupt enjoy lavish lifestyles with impunity." India's situation isn't all that different either. India's citizens are very concerned about corruption. Transparency International cites the "state's inability to effectively deal with petty corruption as well as large-scale corruption scandals" as the cause of the corruption in India. As a result, it is possible to assert that "Democracy is a show of the rich, for the rich, and, of course, by the rich."

The administration purports to be devoted to secularism and non-discrimination under the current democratic system, but this is only rhetoric, and the reality is quite different. In India, secularism calls for treating all religions equally, while the governing BJP encourages Hindu nationalism. A pro-Hindu stance is now referred to as "true secularism," an anti-Muslim stance is now disguised as "emphasis on internal security," and Hindu nationalism has evolved into "cultural nationalism." According to the international non-governmental organisation "Human rights watch" with American headquarters, India has increased pressure on civil society organisations that oppose Government policies by utilising intimidation, harassment, and limits on foreign funding. Both the state and interest groups have begun to assault free speech, and those who criticise the government frequently face charges of sedition and criminal defamation and are branded as "anti-national." Authorities have done nothing to stop vigilante groups' attacks on religious minorities. Communities impacted by caste still experience discrimination [20]. As a result, it is clear that India's democracy leans too much in the direction of autocracy. We can only hope that sooner or later a true democratic government would prevail in this nation, free from all social, political, and economic problems, allowing democracy to flourish.

Conclusion

The finest type of governance is a democracy because it prioritises the needs of the populace. All citizens are treated equally before the law in a democratic type of government, and no one is allowed to assert superiority over another. All eligible citizens equally participate in a democratic system of government, whether directly or indirectly. Everyone has the right to freely and transparently express their opinions in a democracy. A widespread misconception about democracy is that it can choose the greatest and wisest person to lead because it at least has this ability. In a perfect democracy, the current administration has the least impact on our nation. After 70 years of a lengthy experiment, it is impossible to say that our system of government is ideal. A democratic system of administration is more adaptable and successful as a result. The best chances for development and peace are found in democracies.

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