

Democracy in Contemporary India: Major Issues and Challenges

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Abstract:

The ability of Indian democracy to incorporate social heterogeneity, cultural variety and participatory governance within a constitutional framework makes it one of the most dynamic and complicated political systems in the world. India has evolved from a fledgling democratic experiment to a dynamic but contentious democratic polity since 1947, overcoming obstacles brought on by its enormous socio-cultural diversity, economic inequality and geographical complexity. This paper examines the historical evolution, socio-economic transformations and its opportunities and challenges of Indian Democracy that have shaped Indian democracy over the decades. It examines how, while maintaining institutional integrity and public trust, democratic ideals like liberty, equality and justice have adjusted to issues like caste and identity politics, religious polarization, economic liberalization and external pressures. The report also shows how globalization and digitization have changed citizen engagement, accountability, and policy-making, bringing with them difficulties like political division and disinformation as well as opportunities for inclusive governance. Indian democracy is a dynamic system that strives to preserve constitutional objectives while adjusting to new social, economic and technical realities. It is a remarkable example of a large, diverse country maintaining democratic government in the face of complexity and change because it strikes a balance between institutional strength, pluralistic accommodation and participatory citizenship. The study advances a sophisticated knowledge of how Indian democracy balances local ambitions and international constraints, tradition and modernization and inclusiveness and efficiency.

Keywords: Indian democracy, evolution, governance, pluralism, political participation.

Introduction:

Democracy entails government by the people, to ensure that every person participates in the decision-making process, either directly or indirectly through elected representatives. The world's largest democracy is India. It has been somewhat effective for the past more than 60 years. However, in order to guarantee true democracy, India must overcome a number of obstacles. Overpopulation, poverty and the stark disparity between the rich and the poor, adequate sanitation, corruption, illiteracy and the right to education, violence in communities and religions, terrorism, caste-related violence, law and order, economic reforms, good governance, voter turnout, relations with neighboring countries, diplomatic issues, protection of human rights, women's and children's rights and the right to development, implementation of various welfare schemes, protection of the environment, media apathy, frequent dharna, walkouts, noncooperative movements, etc. To reform democracy, India must create fresh legal, political and social ideas. The law is crucial to political transformation because it can discourage bad behavior and promote good. However, legal changes by themselves are insufficient because they might occasionally be counterproductive and have a detrimental effect on society. In order to overcome these obstacles and reinstate true democracy in India, the political establishment and the opposition must collaborate with a true parliamentarian spirit in addition to enacting sound legislation. The clearest example of a watchdog against politicians and bureaucrats abusing democratic values is the Right to Information Act. A democratic political system can only exist in a democratic society. India has not yet embraced democracy

as a way of life. However, anything can only become "a way of life" after a protracted, incremental process that spans generations. Nevertheless, India has shown itself to be a bright example of democracy in spite of the many hardships. A democracy is a type of governance where the people elect their own leaders. Everyone should have equal choice and opportunity in free and fair elections. Voting, running for office and starting political parties shouldn't be the only aspects of democratic rights. Citizens should have certain social and economic rights under democracy. Democracy should go beyond simple governance and its operations to include the eradication of all forms of discrimination. In terms of accountability, consultation and discussion, as well as accommodating social diversity democracy is also the finest type of government. A good democracy is a system of governance in which the people elect their leaders and guarantee that all citizens can freely and fairly participate in the decision-making process, either directly or indirectly through elected representatives.

Review of Literature:

Historical, institutional, and sociopolitical considerations are all included in the scholarly conversation about Indian democracy. According to Granville Austin (1966), the Indian Constitution is a "seamless web" that combines governance and justice. The Congress System was first proposed by Rajni Kothari in 1970, who said that a dominant-party structure that could serve a variety of interests was the source of India's political stability.

The coexistence of "civil and political society," where democratic engagement frequently takes place outside of official institutional institutions, was emphasized by Partha Chatterjee (1997). Indian democracy, according to Sunil Khilnani (1999), is the embodiment of "the idea of India," signifying both the difficulty of reconciling tensions and unity in variety.

Pratap Bhanu Mehta (2003) investigated how populist politics and institutional inefficiencies have both increased and limited democratic legitimacy in modern research. The second democratic uprising, which was characterized by the emergence of backward castes, regional parties and identity-based mobilization, was further examined in studies by Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar (2009). The literature as a whole emphasizes how resilient Indian democracy is due to its ability to adapt and redefine itself in the face of socioeconomic changes.

Research Tool:

Secondary data analysis is the main research method used in this study. Scholarly literature, government reports, academic journals and constitutional documents are examples of sources. Methods of comparison and interpretation have been employed to assess how democratic practices have changed throughout time. In order to understand how Indian democracy is adaptable, the study also makes use of content analysis of political trends, electoral statistics and constitutional revisions.

Research Methodology:

A qualitative and analytical approach is used in this study. Instead of viewing democracy as a set institutional structure, it examines it as a dynamic socio-political construct. The development of democratic ideals from independence to the present is traced using both descriptive and historical methods. Secondary sources, including scholarly publications, legislative papers, Election Commission reports and government archives, were used to collect the data. Through the prisms of social change, political engagement and institutional development, the approach interprets transitions.

Objectives of Research Paper:

1. To examine the historical evolution of Indian democracy from independence to the contemporary period.
2. To analyse the institutional and social factors shaping India's democratic development.

3. To understand how democracy adapts to socio-economic and technological changes.
4. To identify challenges to democratic deepening in India and possible future trajectories.

Role of Political Parties in Indian Democracy

The Indian National Congress (INC) party has dominated Indian politics for nearly 60 years. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was and continues to be the Congress's main rival. In addition to these two, there are a few regional parties that speak for their respective states. After a few years, the age of coalition parties emerged, when the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) were formed if one party failed to secure a majority in the elections. The most significant issue in Indian politics is that at least 25% of parliamentarians are charged with some crime, and about 40 of them are charged with serious crimes. There are numerous national and regional political parties in India. Every party, whatever of size, has a responsibility to ensure the well-being of the people they represent or themselves. For instance, some of the parties are currently engaging in blame games in preparation for the upcoming general election.

Challenges Faced by the Indian Democracy:

India is a vast nation with a wide range of linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity. It was economically underdeveloped when it gained independence. Significant geographical differences, pervasive poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and a lack of nearly all public welfare resources were all present. The public had high hopes for independence. India has undergone significant change, as was already indicated. However, the nation has a number of difficulties in meeting the aspirations of different societal segments. The difficulties stem from both current domestic and global circumstances as well as the absence of sufficient conditions for democracy to run smoothly. These are covered below.

Over Population and Poverty:

It is commonly believed that a hungry person's right to vote is meaningless. The first thing he or she needs is food. As a result, poverty is regarded as the biggest threat to democracy. In actuality, it is the primary cause of all forms of inequality and deprivation. It is the condition of denying people the chance to live a happy and healthy life. Poverty is still one of the biggest issues facing India today, despite the fact that it was a legacy of the lengthy, exploitative British colonial rule. A sizable section of the Indian population still lives below the poverty line, or "BPL." The financial threshold below which people are unable to meet their basic needs, such as food, cloth and shelter, is known as the poverty line. In the 1960s, the government's definition of the poverty line aimed to gauge the degree of poverty based on the amount of money needed to buy the bare minimum of desired foods with nutritional guidelines for calorie consumption. According to the Human Development Index, socioeconomic, political, and human rights issues are all included in the definition of poverty. Mass unemployment and underemployment are two of the many causes that contribute to the ongoing phenomena of poverty. Many people in rural areas lack regular and sufficient employment. There are a lot of educated people without jobs in metropolitan areas as well

Corruption:

In India, corruption is pervasive. In Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, India is placed 95th out of 179 nations; however, its score has steadily increased from 2.7 in 2002 to 3.1 in 2011. Bribery, tax evasion, exchange controls, embezzlement, and other practices are examples of corruption in India. The Right to Information Act of 2005 has been instrumental in exposing a number of politically motivated schemes. One of the primary factors impeding a country's progress is corruption. In India, corruption in public life has been a serious problem. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), India was placed 95th out of 183 nations that were considered corrupt in 2011. In actuality, corruption permeates every aspect of life, including land and property, health, education, business and industry, agriculture, transportation, law enforcement, the military forces and even places of

worship or purported spiritual pursuits. The relationship between politicians, bureaucrats and businesspeople is evident and it has led to corruption and corrupt practices.

Illiteracy:

Illiteracy among people was a matter of grave concern for the successful functioning of democracy in India on the eve of independence and it still continues to be a major challenge. Both the successful operation of democracy and the nation's socioeconomic progress depend on citizens' educational attainment. Perhaps more significantly, it is a prerequisite for human dignity. However, at the time of India's independence, formal literacy was practically nonexistent. In 1951, only 18.33 percent of people were literate, and only 8.9 percent of women were literate. As a result, many were concerned that citizens would not be able to fulfill their responsibilities and meaningfully exercise their right to vote, which is a person's way of expressing the power of the people.

Regionalism:

Regionalism, which is mostly the result of regional differences and developmental imbalances, has also been a problem for Indian democracy. As everyone knows, India is a multicultural nation with a wide variety of communities, tribes, languages, faiths and customs. Several linguistic and cultural groupings are concentrated in specific geographic areas. Regional disparities and imbalances in terms of per capita income, literacy rates, health and educational infrastructure and services, population situation and levels of industrial and agricultural development persist even though the country's development process aims to grow and develop all regions. A sense of neglect, deprivation and discrimination is produced by the existence and persistence of regional disparities both within and between states. Due to this circumstance, regionalism has emerged as calls for the formation of new states, increased autonomy or power for existing states, or even secession from the nation.

Violence in Politics:

Although violence has existed for a long time, using violence for political purposes puts any system at jeopardy. There has been a lot of violence in India. Political violence in general, caste violence and communal violence in particular have reached grave proportions. Vested interests instigate communal riots for economic, religious and political purposes. Caste violence has been on the rise in many forms. There are still significant feudal components in society despite advancements in agriculture, the end of the zamindari system and movements like the Green and White Revolutions. Higher and middle castes now have a significant conflict of interest, which has sparked a fierce struggle for political dominance that frequently results in violence. The pushback from the higher castes against the Dalits and lower castes, especially the Scheduled Castes and the backward castes, who are becoming more conscious of and assertive of their rights, is another facet of caste violence. Violence is used during elections to either energize voters or stop them from exercising their right to vote. Furthermore, calls for state separation, state rearrangement or boundary adjustments have been linked to bloodshed.

Terrorism:

Punjab, Central India, the Seven Sister States and Jammu and Kashmir are the regions where a lot of terrorist activity occurs. Pakistan has frequently been accused of sponsoring terrorism in India. It leads to the challenges of Indian democracy.

Suggestions:

1. The three pillars of democracy -legislatures, the executive branch, and the judiciary, should cooperate by monitoring the nation's current issues. These organizations should constantly work to uphold the genuine spirit of democracy and make an effort to adapt to the nation's shifting circumstances.

2. It is crucial to keep in mind that democracy revolves around the electorate. It is important to educate the electorate about political consciousness. It implies that people are capable of understanding or being conscious of their obligations and rights. They need to be aware of their benefits and rights.
3. Lack of political 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 are not conscious about their political problems, then the system of democratic governance will not be successful.
4. The media, which is the fourth pillar of democracy, ought to actively contribute by presenting accurate information and upholding the genuine essence of democracy. India's media must be trusted to be independent in order for the government to discover the real social facts.
5. In order to preserve democracy, politicians are essential. They must be democratic in spirit and think of themselves as the nation's servants rather than its citizens. They ought to work toward the nation's growth and adhere to the notion of community service. In India, a politician can engage in politics based on topics rather than caste, religion or communal politics.
They must play such a significant role in the nation that, in order for democracy to function smoothly, the genuine spirit of democracy must be revitalized and reconfigured.

Conclusion:

Even though India is regarded as one of the biggest democracies in the world, there are a number of new problems or challenges that actually make it difficult for the democratic republic of India to run smoothly. It is debatable, nevertheless, that despite 79 years of independence since 1947, India still has a high rate of illiteracy, corruption, terrorism and Maoist activity, all of which pose a danger to the foundation of democratic administration. Every democracy in the modern world has encountered several political, social, religious and economic issues. People can work together to find solutions to these issues. Furthermore, a democracy can only thrive when there is a spirit of cooperation between the people and the government and when there is no significant difference in their perspectives. Voters' faith in democracy has declined as a result of politicians' corruption and self-interest. However, we are citizens of the world's largest democracy, which guarantees its residents equal rights and obligations. Therefore, it is the ultimate responsibility of politicians, governments and citizens to work together, actively participate in government operations and make their nation flawless.

Despite its flaws, Indian democracy is nevertheless a dynamic and changing system. Its capacity to handle and resolve disagreements within a constitutional framework is what makes it strong, not the lack of conflict. The Indian democratic project has evolved over the past 79 years from elite-driven politics to broad engagement, mirroring the nation's socioeconomic changes. India's democracy has endured because of its strong foundations in political pluralism, civic involvement and constitutional morality. However, democracy must constantly change to maintain its vitality, embracing transparency, bolstering institutions and guaranteeing inclusivity. As a result, the development of Indian democracy is deeply social as well as political, reflecting the people's unwavering faith in equality, freedom and group advancement.

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