

Indian Democracy: Evolution, Changes and Contemporary Challenges

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Abstract

Since gaining independence in 1947, Indian democracy has effectively maintained democratic administration, making it one of the most impressive political experiments in the contemporary world. This study looks at the development, structural characteristics, and current issues facing Indian democracy. It draws attention to the fundamental ideas that support democratic functioning in India, including equality, participation, the rule of law, accountability, and secularism. Indian democracy faces numerous socioeconomic and political obstacles despite its successes, which include frequent free and fair elections and robust institutional frameworks. Its efficacy and inclusivity are nevertheless hampered by problems including political violence, gender inequality, casteism, poverty, illiteracy, corruption, and regional differences. The study also looks at new issues that threaten democratic stability, such as the criminalization of politics, communalism, and the shrinkage of democratic spaces. In order to maintain democratic values, it also highlights the necessity of institutional strengthening, transparency, decentralization, and the defense of fundamental rights. The study comes to the conclusion that although Indian democracy has proven resilient and adaptable, its survival hinges on the state, civil society, and individuals working together to address enduring issues and uphold democratic values in society and governance.

Keywords: Indian Democracy, Democratic Institutions, Political Participation, Governance and Accountability, Corruption, Socio-economic Inequality, Electoral System, Political Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

The fact that India has remained a democratic nation despite gaining independence from British domination seven decades ago is undoubtedly a magnificent accomplishment. It is a no-mean accomplishment because many of the various Asian and African nations that gained independence in the 1950s and 1960s have returned to non-democratic systems like dictatorships or military rule. With the exception of the brief 21-month state of emergency established by the Indira Gandhi administration in 1975–1977, India's democratic record has been largely positive. Even though India faced several obstacles when it gained its freedom, it was able to overcome the majority of them with tremendous difficulty. The aftermath of the issues brought about by India's division was the primary challenge facing the country's newly formed administration. India handled the enormous burden of relocating and caring for the millions of refugees from Pakistan with remarkable skill.

Many people view India as a prime example of how democracy may succeed in developing nations. Since gaining independence from Britain in 1947 and adopting a liberal-democratic constitution in 1950

following three years of discussion in its Constituent Assembly, it has remained a democracy with regular free and fair elections and the predominance of the standard democratic freedoms for its citizens. The Emergency of 1975–1977, which was enforced under a constitutional clause, was the only interruption to this democratic rule. sustained democracy for more than 70 years in a nation devoid of what are often regarded as the correlates, if not prerequisites, of stable democracy (high income, widespread literacy and education, and urbanization as a result of industrial and economic development), as well as its size combined with religious, linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and regional diversity. Given the number of participants and the low literacy rate in India at the time, the universal adult vote in the first general election of Independent India in 1951–1952 is an accomplishment in and of itself. Over 173 million of the 360 million eligible voters cast ballots, making it the largest such exercise in history. There have been sixteen general elections for the House of Representatives, several elections for state legislative assemblies, and elections for local self-government institutions in each state since that historic election in 1951–52. Power transfers and governmental changes have occurred in a calm and orderly manner. Everyone agrees that our elections are free and fair, and the Election Commission of India, an independent constitutional agency, holds them on a regular basis. The Indian constitution, which established parliamentary democracy, requires Parliament to have authority over political executives and to hold them directly accountable for all activities they perform while serving as state officials. The leaders of Independent India should also be commended for creating strong institutions that have endured over time. Our democracy has benefited greatly from the efforts of the judiciary, the Election Commission of India, the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, the National Human Rights Commission, the office of the Chief Information Commissioners, etc.

Objective of the study

- To research India's current democratic state.
- To examine the several difficulties that the largest democracy, such as India, faces.

Principles of Democracy

The majority of individuals think that democratic values are necessary for a democracy to flourish. The following are the key tenets of democracy:

Public participation: Individuals have an obligation and a right to take part in civil society and government programs. Standing for office, casting a ballot, educating oneself, organizing and participating in community gatherings, joining political and/or civic organizations, paying taxes, protesting, and petitioning are all examples of public participation.

Equality: Everyone ought to get equal treatment, be free from prejudice, and have equal chances.

Tolerance: The rights of opposition or minority groups are safeguarded in republics, even while the party that represents the majority of people controls the government. Everyone is equally served by the government. Everyone ought to be free to voice their thoughts and join the political, religious, or civic organizations of their choice.

Accountability: The public must hold the government responsible for all of its acts, including the enactment and execution of legislation. Our taxes fund government expenditures, therefore all financial statements and budgets ought to be made public and given to parliament.

Transparency: The public must have access to the government's actions. Before new laws are approved, the public must be able to provide feedback.

Regular, free and fair elections: Elections must be conducted in a free and fair manner, free from threats, corruption, or intimidation of voters before to or during the election. Regular elections should also take place. These happen every five years in South Africa.

Accepting the results of elections: When a political party loses an election, both the party and its supporters have to accept the outcome.

Economic freedom: In a democracy, people should be able to pick their own jobs, join labor unions, and possess some form of private property and company.

Controlling and preventing the abuse of power: There ought to be measures in place to stop public servants from misusing their authority. The courts ought to be autonomous and endowed with the authority to:

- Take action against government representatives or organizations that engage in unlawful or corrupt behavior.
- Permit elections and public involvement
- Examine police misuse of authority

Human rights: The Bill of Rights upholds and safeguards both individual and collective human rights. All citizens of the nation are entitled to a number of freedoms and privileges listed in the Bill of Rights. To stop these from being infringed, all liberties and rights must be safeguarded. The Constitution's Section 7 defines the Bill of Rights as follows:

- The foundation of South African democracy is the Bill of Rights. It upholds the democratic ideals of freedom, equality, and human dignity as well as the rights of every citizen of our nation.
- The state is required to uphold, defend, advance, and fulfil the Bill of Rights.

Multi-party system: Election participation and governmental participation must be open to multiple political parties. Independent ward candidates are also offered at the local government level.

Rule of law: The rule of law states that everyone is subject to the law, including the nation's president and legislature. Everyone must abide by the law and face consequences if they do not. Additionally, the law must be applied consistently, fairly, and equally. Laws are the regulations that parliament makes on our behalf. The judiciary upholds the rule of law and serves as referees. They will apply the Constitution and laws to determine if any action taken by the government, individuals, groups, or businesses was lawful or unlawful.

CHANGES & CHALLENGES

India is a sovereign, socialist, secular democratic republic, according to the country's constitution. The founding fathers of the constitution and India's great leaders had a clear idea of what that democracy should look like. And it was made very clear that justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity would be guaranteed to every Indian citizen. On the eve of India's 70th anniversary of independence, many academics and laypeople are questioning how successful and earnest we have been in implementing the lofty goals of our former leaders.

The nature of India's democracy, its capacity to advance all facets of society, the treatment of Dalits, Adivasis, and other marginalized groups, and other issues are all being questioned. The state frequently fails to protect the people's constitutionally protected right to free speech and expression, which is causing the democratic space for opposition to drastically decrease in India. The killings of social activists and rationalist intellectuals, as well as the arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights campaigners, have

sparked serious worries about India's democracy around the world. The murders of rationalist intellectuals were reported.

The fact that India is the world's largest democracy is a source of great pride for Indians, particularly its leaders. Furthermore, no country in the world can easily surpass this record. Since the time of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister and a statesman of extraordinary caliber, India has enjoyed great respect and adoration from the international community due to its unique status. India is not a military or economic superpower, but because it is a free country governed by the Rule of Law, its viewpoint is important to the international community. Therefore, it makes sense that India has a lot riding on the success of its democracy.

Principles of Indian democracy

The ideals of peace, freedom of choice, freedom to hold different opinions, acceptability, equality, governance for the welfare of the people, and inclusivity in a society are all included in the Indian ethos of democracy. These elements enable its common people to live honorable lives.

- India is a democratic, republican, socialist, secular, and sovereign nation.
- Socialists provide equal opportunity and social standing, implying social and economic equality for all Indian citizens.
- Being secular meant having the right to practice any religion you wanted. There is no official state religion, and all religions are treated equally by the government.
- A democratic government is one that is chosen by the populace.
- A republic suggests that the head of state is indirectly chosen by the populace rather than being a hereditary monarch or queen.

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, trade and industry, agriculture, transportation, law enforcement, the military forces, and even places of worship or purported spiritual pursuits. At all three levels—political, bureaucratic, and corporate—corruption persists in both overt and hidden forms. The relationship between politicians, bureaucrats, and industrialists is evident, and it has led to corruption and corrupt activities. Have you or your friends seen this occur during a recent election? Numerous scams have surfaced in our nation in rapid succession in recent years. In actuality, corruption poses a major threat to the legitimacy and propriety of government since it is an indication of institutional deterioration and political instability. As citizens, we ought to make a commitment to abstain from all forms of corruption and help eradicate it from our nation.

Poverty:

Poverty is still one of the biggest issues facing India today, despite being a legacy of the lengthy and exploitative British colonial rule. A sizeable section of the Indian population, known as "BPL," still lives below the poverty line. The financial threshold below which people are unable to meet their basic needs—such as food, let alone clothing and shelter—is known as the poverty line. The government's definition of the poverty line in the 1960s was to gauge the degree of poverty based on the amount of money needed to buy the bare minimum of attractive food that met a person's nutritional requirements for caloric intake.

It states that to stay over the poverty line in India, an individual in rural regions needs an average of 2400 calories per day, while an individual in urban areas needs an average of 2100 calories per day. The 1990s saw the inclusion of non-food things in the concept of poverty, such as clothing, work, housing, education, etc. In the modern era, systematic denial of rights is associated with poverty. Additionally, Mabud-ul-Haq and Amartya Sen's Human Development Index (HDI) is linked to this concept. According to the HDI, socioeconomic-political and human rights concerns fall under the notion of poverty.

Illiteracy:

On the eve of India's independence, illiteracy was a serious threat to the country's democracy, and it remains a significant obstacle today. 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 non-existent. 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.

Gender Discrimination:

There is discrimination against women and girls in many spheres of life. You must have encountered the pervasive gender disparity in our society and political system. However, we are aware that one of the fundamental tenets of democracy is gender equality. The Indian Constitution requires the State to guarantee that women are not discriminated against and that men and women are treated equally. The Directive Principles of State, as well as fundamental rights and obligations.

Casteism:

The division of labor in ancient civilization is thought to have given rise to the caste system, which has evolved into a more or less rigid group classification based on birth. Have you ever encountered the caste system in society or in your own life? You will concur that the practice of untouchability, which persists despite being prohibited by the constitution, is the most harmful and inhumane feature of the caste system. This has resulted in the "Dalits," or so-called low castes, being segregated and denied access to social amenities like schooling. The Dalits have historically done some of the most physically demanding jobs in society as well as menial labor. Even in democratic political systems, casteism has been detrimental. In actuality, casteism has gained notoriety as a tactic used to take use of caste consciousness for specific political objectives.

Regionalism:

Regionalism, which is mostly the result of regional differences and development inequalities, has also been a problem for Indian democracy. As everyone knows, India is a multicultural nation with a wide range of groups, languages, religions, tribes, and customs. Certain geographical areas are home to a variety of linguistic and cultural groups. 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 despite the nation's development process aiming to grow and develop all regions. A sense of neglect, deprivation, and discrimination is produced by the existence

and persistence of regional disparities 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.

Sanitation:

As of 2008, just 31% of Indians have access to adequate sanitation facilities, according to data from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). UNICEF research has also demonstrated that illnesses brought on by inadequate sanitation have an impact on children's cognitive development.

Naxalism:

The Sino-Soviet divide within the Indian communist movement gave rise to the communist organization known as Naxalism. There is naxalism in places like Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, and West Bengal.

Various challenges to Democracy in India



Criminalization of Politics:

The criminalization of politics in India has become a contentious topic in recent years. There have been claims that certain political factions lack faith in democratic principles and processes. To win elections, they resort to violence and other unhealthy, undemocratic tactics. There is no doubt that this is an unhealthy trend in politics, and it is imperative that such tendencies be seriously checked. Criminalizing politics has no place in a democratic system since it is an outright rejection of democratic principles. Adopting and advancing democratic values and abstaining from criminal activity can strengthen democracy. The judiciary has recently shown hints of implementing corrective steps to place a strong check on criminal

inclinations in politics. To properly address this issue, the federal government and numerous state governments have begun taking action. This is a source of immense happiness and a positive indication that our nation's democracy is operating successfully. As conscious citizens and voters in the world's largest democracy, we can also help by deterring people with criminal records from running for office. Communalism: In India, religious fanaticism and communalism have taken on a frighteningly lethal form. They interfere with our multireligious society's coexistence structure. Communalism is a terrible blow to India's developing secular culture and an insult to its nationalist identity. It destroys our wonderful legacy of humanism and composite culture and undermines our democratic political stability. Communalism is frequently mistakenly used as a synonym for conservatism or religion. Communalism is not adherence to a religion or allegiance to a religious community.

Political Violence:

Although violence has long existed, its use for political purposes poses a threat to any system's viability. There has been a lot of violence in India. Political violence, caste violence, and communal violence have all 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.

Policies to strength the Democracy

Families and huge societies should foster democratic values. Every citizen of the nation ought to respect the freedom and rights of others. Politics based on caste and religion ought to be prohibited during elections.

- It is necessary to resist social and economic inequity.
- Before the law, every citizen is equal.
- bolstering the independence of the judiciary, particularly the Indian Supreme Court, to expedite the administration of justice and cut down on courtroom delays.
- bolstering anti-corruption organizations like India's Lokpal Lokayukta.
- Make sure the government's decision-making process is transparent.
- to enhance decentralization of power, which grants local organizations greater authority and resources.
- to defend vulnerable groups, minorities, and fundamental rights.

CONCLUSION

This essay has presented a variety of information regarding the numerous difficulties India has experienced over the years. It is clear that democracies like India face a number of difficulties that should worry everyone. The government has made a number of actions to address too many of these issues since independence. Many of these have seen notable advancements. Governmental organizations, civil society, public politics, and political parties should work together. In order to establish a democratic government in India, we should endeavor to overcome all the barriers and difficulties.

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