New Dimension of the Indian democracy

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Abstract

The Indian experience runs against the widely held view that rich societies are much more likely to be democratic than poor ones, and that societies with large minority populations are prone to ethnic cleansing and civil war. Democracy in India, a poor and notoriously diverse country, has succeeded for more than half the twentieth century and seems likely to succeed as well in the twenty-first. The party political domain of India is replete with a large number of parties representing the tapestry of the Indian society. Many of them are based in specific regions and states, built around social and linguistic identities. While this enhanced the representative character of the parties, it also contributed to varied patterns of political competition and unstable governments. The two major national parties the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party becoming ready and willing to form coalitions heralded an era of coalition governments both at the centre and states, enabling parties to increase their power and their pay-offs. Parties across the political spectrum have tended to converge on macroeconomic policy, but continue to diverge on social policies and larger issues that confront India, such as nation building and secularism. Chronic lack of internal democracy coupled with the rise of political corruption and clienteles' practices are matters of serious concern. A broader view of governance, resisting temptations to concentrate power and pursue personal enrichment would enable parties to deliver policies for a better, more just society.

Keywords: India, democracy, governance, parties

Introduction

We may deprecate India's political parties, the way they function and the means party leaders adopt to maximize electoral support. We may blame them for the ills we see in Indian society and political practice. Such an attitude is not unjustified. Yet we cannot ignore the role parties have played in bringing about a massive democratic political transformation over the past six decades since independence. This transformation was by no means inevitable; most former colonies went through periods of political instability, military coups and authoritarian regimes, but India has moved towards law-based democratization. The mediating role political parties have played in bringing about this democratic transformation in a relatively peaceful manner, in a short span of time and under conditions considered not very conducive to democratic development, cannot be underestimated. They have assisted in the consolidation and expansion of democracy, popularized the notions of equality, social justice and freedom and opened doors for inclusion, voice and empowerment of the weaker sections of society. Superficially, political parties may appear to divide people, but parties also attenuate conflict, and show the way for people to come together. Thus, the party domain in India is full of intense struggle over contentious social

and policy issues and also the space in which compromise and consensus are hammered out. What is required, therefore, is a critical and balanced assessment of parties that takes into accounts their strengths and achievements as well their weaknesses and failings in furthering democracy and governance.

Political parties in the Western democracies have declined as mass democratic parties in recent decades, especially in terms of membership, not to speak of the dissolution of communist parties in Europe and Australia. Parties in India, by contrast, continue to be vibrant and have millions of members. The self-reported membership of Indian parties ranges from about a million for the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI[M]) to about 40 million for the Congress, and more than 100 million for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It is true that the average length of party membership or affiliation has become short, as party members and supporters shift frequently from one party to the other, depending to a large extent on whether a party is in power or not. If we leave aside the strength and durability of party attachments, the fact remains that large number of people are willing to attach themselves to a party at a given point of time. Parties occupy a central place in the collective life and imagination. They are a constant feature in the television and electronic media, constituting, along with cinema, the popular culture in India. The huge numbers of ordinary people who gather at the meetings of political leaders, either out of curiosity to see the leader, liking for the party or out of an expectation of collective and individual welfare benefits, provides a testimony to the primacy of political parties to the people of India.

Political parties have played a crucial role in effecting social and political transformation, but the domain of parties has also undergone tremendous change. In the decades following Independence, the plural and federal character of India's polity quickly asserted itself. Within two decades of the first general elections, the dominance of the Congress party began to crack. A large number of new parties emerged, and many of them became ruling parties at the national or state level or both. In many states, the national parties have been marginalized or become adjuncts to their state-based rivals. This flux in the party domain and the proliferation of parties has given rise to coalition governments, which have become a regular feature of Indian politics since the 1990s. A large number of parties have shared power in these coalitions over the years. For instance, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government, under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, ruled at the centre from 1999 to 2004 with about 30 different partners. The two governments formed by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) also drew on the support of more than 10 alliance partners. Thus, the ability to secure the electoral support of regional and small parties has determined the fate of national parties in general elections over the past two decades. The BJP realized this in 1998, while the Congress took a few more years to accept the changed reality. In the 2014 Lok Sabha (lower house) elections, the BJP under Narendra Modi's leadership won an absolute majority. But it could do so only in alliance with several large and small parties in different states. In recognition of this situation, the party has formed a coalition government rather than a single-party government. Despite these alliances, the BJP has not been able to muster majority support in the Rajya Sabha (upper house), which has left the

government unable to secure approval of major legislation. It is not certain whether the BJP alliance can reach majority mark on its own by the time its term ends in 2019.

Historically background of Democracy

Democracy is derived from the Greek word Krates' meaning power or rule. Democracy thus means rule of the demos (the demos refereeing to the people, although the Greeks originally used this to mean the poor or the many. Thus democracy essentially links to the government to the people and hence Abhram Lincon's famous definition of Democracy is government of the people, by the people and for the people‖ rightly expresses the spirit of democracy.Very broadly, democracy may mean the following

1. The system of rule by the poor and disadvantaged.

2. A form of government in which the people rule themselves directly and without the need for professional politicians or public officials.

3. A society based on equal opportunity and individual merit rather than hierarchy and privileges.

4. A system of welfare and redistribution aimed at narrow social inequalities.

5. A system of decision making based on the Principe of majority rule

6. A system of rule that secures the right and interests of minorities by placing checks upon the power of the majority.

7. A means of filling public offices through a competitive struggle for the popular vote.

8. A system of government that serves the interest of people regardless of their participation in political life.

Democracy is broadly classified as:

- **Direct Democracy**

Direct Democracy is also called as participatory democracy this was the first ever model of democracy introduced in the Greek city state of Athensin 3rd century BC. In this form of democracy, citizens participated in the affairs of the state directly and had a say in the governance of the city state. Every citizen had a political right in theism state. (Women and

Slaves were not allowed to participate). Direct democracy thus obliterates the distinction between government and the governed and between the state and civil society.

Features of Direct Democracy

It heightens the control that citizens can exercise over their own destinies as it is the only pure form of government. It creates better informed and more politically sophisticated citizens. It enables the public to express their own views and interests without having to rely in self-serving politicians.

- **Representative Democracy**

Representative Democracy It is also called limited or indirect democracy. The narrow meaning of representative democracy as understood by many is periodic voting after a stipulated time (in case of India it is every five years). However the larger meaning of democracy is full participation in the day today affairs of governance. The process of election is essentially to establish a link between the government and the governed.

Features of representative democracy:

It is a practicable form of democracy. It relieves ordinary citizens the burden of decision making thus possible a division of labour in politics. It allows governed to be placed in the hands of those with better education, expert knowledge and greater experience.

Principles of Democracy are as follows

1. **Government by consent:** democracy is government by consent of the people. Rational consent can be obtained by persuasion for which an atmosphere of free discussion is essential. Consent is obtained at two levels.

A) Among the representatives of the people in the legislative assemblies where members of the opposition have their full say and

B) At a public level where there is a direct communication between the leadership and the people.

2. Public Accountability: It essentially means the representatives must remain answerable to the people. As we have seen earlier that democracy essentially is based on public consent, therefore it is implied that the government should be responsible and responsive to the people. Whatever will and aspirations of the people are, the government should attempt to fulfil/realise those if they fall well within the constitutional framework of the country.

3. Majority Rule:

In modern representative democracies, decisions are taken in several bodies right from electing the government to the committees that are constituted. It is considered to be the heart of the democratic system that all issues in all the bodies from legislature to cabinet, executives and other committees are resolved through majority decisions. Political equality is secured by the principle of neither one man on vote, which implies that there will be no privileged sections claiming special weightage nor any underprivileged section whose voice is ignored. No discrimination is allowed on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth or ownership of property. The principle of majority rule relies on the wisdom of the majority.

4. Constitutional government and Rule of Law:

Constitutional government means government by law rather than by men. Democracy requires an infinitely complex machinery of process, procedures and institutions to translate the majority will into action. If one compromises with the law, rampant corruption and decay of democracy is ensured. It is therefore, essential to have a well-established tradition of law and constitution for the stability of a democratic government.

Dimensions of Democracy: Social Democracy, Economic and Political

Social Democracy is a political, social and economic ideology that supports economic And social interventions to promote social justice within the framework of a capitalist economy, as well as a policy regime involving a commitment to representative democracy, measures for income redistribution, and regulation of the economy in the general interest and welfare state provisions.

Social democracy thus aims to create the conditions for capitalism to lead to greater democratic, egalitarian and solidarity outcomes; and is often associated with the set of socioeconomic policies that became prominent in Northern and Western Europe. In India Dr. B.R Ambedkar the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution strongly advocated for Social Democracy.

Core values of Social Democracy are as follows.

1. Freedom, Equality and Fraternity: This was the battle cry of the French Revolution; and these broadly remain the core values of democratic parties today. The formulation of core values began in the nineteenth century with the rise of the bourgeoisie and they began to conquer the world at the latest in the mid-twentieth century they came to be the standard by

Which states and societies were judged?

2. This is also reflected in the legal foundations of the United Nations. With the UN's two Human Rights Covenants of 1966 the fundamental civic, political, economic, social and cultural rights attained the apex of their legitimacy and have been ratified by almost every country in the world. They constitute something like a global legal foundation. Fundamental rights are supposed to ensure the transposition of core values into formal legal claims.

3. Fundamental Rights: These are the rights enshrined in the constitutions of democratic countries. These are claims that individuals have in a state. In India, Fundamental Rights are enshrined in Part III of the constitution. If the fundamental rights are abridged by any individual or the state, any citizen can move the Supreme Court or the High courts.

Economic democracy or stakeholder democracy is a socioeconomic philosophy that proposes to shift decision-making power from corporate managers and corporate shareholders to a larger group of public stakeholders that includes workers, customers, suppliers, neighbours and the broader public. No single definition or approach encompasses economic democracy, but most proponents claim that modern property relations externalize costs, subordinate the general well-being to private profit, and deny the polity a democratic voice in economic policy decisions.

In addition to these moral concerns, economic democracy makes practical claims, such as that it can compensate for capitalism's inherent effective demand gap.

Political Democracy is a means for the people to choose their leaders and to hold their leaders accountable for their policies and their conduct in office. The people decide who will represent them in parliament, and who will head the government at the national and local levels. They do so by choosing between competing parties in regular, free and fair elections. Government is based on the consent of the governed. In a democracy, the people are sovereign they are the highest form of political authority. Power flows from the people to the leaders of government, who hold power only temporarily. Political Democracy is a means for the people to choose their leaders and to hold their leaders accountable for their policies and their conduct in office. The people decide who will represent them in parliament, and who will head the government at the national and local levels. They do so by choosing between competing parties in regular, free and fair elections. Government is based on the consent of the governed. In a democracy, the people are sovereign they are the highest form of political authority. Power flows from the people to the leaders of government, who hold power only temporarily. Challenges before Democracy the basic challenges before democracy in India are poverty, illiteracy, lower participation, criminalisation of politics, political violence, corruption, communalism, Regionalism.

Women After family, patriarchy exists most in politics. Women are always considered to be the secondary citizens of the country. Hence, the opportunities for participation are minimal to them. In most cases they do not even have the right to select their own candidates and are often forced to vote for a candidate who the head of the family (generally male) askes to. If at all women come out to vote during various elections from parliamentary to state legislature to the local bodies of Municipal corporations, municipal councils, the zilla-parishads to panchayat samities to the gram panchayat, the turnout is generally very low. As regards contesting elections women though 33% reservation is available very few women volunteer for the same. As the posts are reserved the political families or the male members of the family operate from behind the curtain.

The government machinery cannot the entire time attempt to bring them to the main stream. Hence community initiatives are most needed in this sphere. These marginalised groups are not even registered voters and hence a large number of people are out of the fray of election and in turn democratic process. It is therefore imperative to bring these people into the political sphere of the country.

Conclusion

The Indian democracy contains lessons for the study of Indian politics, but also for the study of democratic politics more generally. India is the world's largest democracy, and Indians constitute about half of the people who live in what Freedom House defines as 'free' societies. This collection reveals how 'actually existing democracy' is practiced, which may give advocates of democracy reasons to despair. The contributors illustrate how growing political participation has been accompanied by a decline in intra-party democracy, and how identities and ideologies have sometimes dissuaded extremist parties from gravitating towards the centre of the political spectrum. But it is also true that India regularly holds elections, losers leave positions of power with the promise that they can try again in the next election and more leaders from underprivileged groups have ascended to power. It is understandable that observers of Indian politics may be disappointed with what they see, but their disappointment points out the great unrealized potential of democracy in India. This collection sheds light on the slow but steady progress that Indian political parties have made towards realizing that potential of crafting democracy in India.

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