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Indian Democracy- Issues and Challenges

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Abstract:

Democracy means that political institutions with democratic processes and every Indian citizen is to be democratic, reflecting basic democratic values of equality, liberty, fraternity, secularism and justice in the social environment and individual behavior. Education, poverty, social exclusion and inclusion, corruption and criminalization of politics are the main challenges of democracy and most essential elements to be present in democratic government for implementation of constitutional provisions in India. Education is an important weapon to promote democracy and it remains as essential factor of social and economic rights. But it remains as a matter of grave concern for the successful functioning of democracy in India since from independence. Poverty is a greatest set back of democracy. Social exclusion/inclusion or caste system weakens the functioning and stability of democratic system. In 2011, India was ranked 95th of 183 countries defined as corrupt in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). However, equality, good governance, civil society participation can remove these threats to have better democratic system in India.

Keywords: Democracy, issues and challenges, equality, preamble, constitution, good governance, civil society.

1. Introduction

Democracy coined Greek word from two words: *demos* that means “people” and *Kratos* which refers to “power”. That is, in a democracy the power rests with the people. Democracy has been defined in many different approaches. Abraham Lincoln defines “Democracy is a government of the people, for the people, and by the people.” Further Bryce says that “Democracy really means nothing more or less than the rule of the whole people, expressing their Sovereign will by their votes”. And MacIver states, “Democracy is not a way of governing, whether by majority or otherwise, but primarily a way of determining, who shall govern, and broadly to what ends.

2. Most Essential Elements of Democratic Government Are the Real Challenges of Indian Democracy

Democracy means that political institutions with democratic processes and every Indian citizen is to be democratic, reflecting basic democratic values of equality, liberty, fraternity, secularism and justice in the social environment and individual behavior. In other way it can be termed as a genuine democracy only when it fulfills both political and socio-economic aspects of people's participation and satisfaction. For this reason, it needs to adopt a Constitution and laws that vest supreme power with the people. The followings are the challenges of democracy and most essential elements to be present in democratic government for implementation of constitutional provisions in India.

2.1. Education

Education is an important weapon to promote democracy and it remains as essential factor of social and economic rights. Education enables citizens to participate in elections and makes them conscious of the principles of liberty and equality of all and can be aware of various issues, problems, demands, and interests in the country. But it remains as a matter of grave concern for the successful functioning of democracy in India since from independence. The literacy rate in 1951 was mere 18.33 per cent which was apprehended that citizens would not be able to play their roles effectively and exercise their right to vote meaningfully. The same has been proved many times by the Indian electorate over the years but in fewer times even it has been proved wrong. For example, in 1977's general election, the people of India rejected very popular and powerful Ms. Indira Gandhi primarily because of the misuse of power during emergency in 1975-1977. After that there have been changes in the governments both at the Centre and in the States almost regularly.

2.2. Poverty

Poverty is a greatest set back of democracy. In 2011 World Bank stated in India poverty rate is 42%. According to a committee recently constituted by Indian government to estimate poverty, says that nearly 38% of India's population (380 million) is poor. India was ranked 134 out of 182 countries of the world by Human Development Report 2009 of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Poverty denies a healthy and full fulfilling life for the people. Poverty is linked directly linked with systemic deprivation of rights and inequalities. Poverty is attributed to unemployment in rural as well as urban areas. Furthermore, the process of economic development has been failed to ensure social justice and to bridge the gap between rich and poor.

2.3. Social Exclusion and Inclusion/Caste System

Social exclusion/inclusion or caste system weakens the functioning and stability of democratic system. The most detrimental and inhuman aspect of the caste system is the practice of untouchability which is continuing in spite of the constitutional ban imposed on it. This has led to segregation of so called low castes or 'Dalits', depriving them of education and other social benefits. Nowadays, caste plays a negative role in the democratic political processes and becomes a notorious strategy of exploitation of caste consciousness for narrow political gains. It means the democratic facilities - like fundamental rights relating to equality, freedom of speech, expression and association, participation in the electoral process, free media and press, and legislative forums - are misused for maintaining casteist identity. With these realities India has been proving since from times immemorial that India has an unequal society forever. The Scheduled Castes (SCs), the Scheduled Tribes (STs) and the backward classes have been suffering down the ages from socio-economic deprivations and even after constitutional special provisions for their protection. It is for the reasons such as illiteracy, ignorance, poverty and political willingness (caste Politics) etc. It is very unfair to see Indian society as caste consciousness castes are being increasingly used as vote bank politics despite the era of liberalization and globalization.

2.4. Corruption

Corruption is also a major threat for democracy in India. In 2011, India was ranked 95th of 183 countries defined as corrupt in Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index* (CPI). It is true that corruption is rampant in all walks of human life viz., land and property, health, education, commerce and industry, agriculture, transport, police, armed forces, even religious institutions. Corruption exists in three levels - political, bureaucratic and corporate sector. One can see the nexus between the politicians, the bureaucrats and the industrialists which has resulted into corruption and corrupt practices. The tentacles of corruption have affected all organs of government, including the judiciary. It needs to understand that corruption is a cause for political instability and institutional decay, challenging seriously the validity and propriety of governance. For corruption there is no boundary like caste, education, region, religion, status etc. All variety of human being indulges in it.

2.5. Criminalization of Politics

In almost years, politicians indulge in violence and take refuge in other unhealthy, undemocratic methods to win elections. Undoubtedly, this is not a healthy trend in politics and there is an urgent need to apply serious check on such tendencies. It is the very negation of democratic values and has no place in a democratic set up. They are less educated with an ideology and conscience. Furthermore, their greediness making them to bring their kin and nepotistic networks to the politics which is blocking the democratic style of representation. For example, The Indian National Congress has been dominating by members of the family of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Another large national party the BJP is facing leadership crises with its allies and differences with ideology. Whatever the party but it is right to be noted here that they are reluctant to give top posts to youth and women.

3. Measures to Have Access to Democracy

Democracy in India faces more serious challenges and need to have concern to them.

Though the efforts of independence governments are showing significant improvements still have to be done lots. Civil society needs to take serious part with the government to better the prevailing condition. Poverty, lack of education and social exclusion in general reduce access to democracy. However certain measures that have been discussed as follows:

3.1. Equal Quality Education for All

Democracy is obviously based on idea of equality and the significance and necessity of education for efficient functioning of democracy was appreciated by the framers of the Indian Constitution. There is no equal qualitative education to all in India. Whatever the efforts are there for improve the quality and quantity education to realize the constitutional mandate that free and compulsory education to all children up to the fourteen years of age, the National Policy on Education 1986, a National Literacy Mission 1988 under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Right to Education Act, 2009 is not sufficient and efficient. In addition to that Saakshar Bharat 2009 aims at developing functional literacy and numeracy in the age group of fifteen and above to enable them to make their signature and to consider them under literacy group and truly it is not making to learn beyond basic literacy and acquire equivalence to formal educational system. Finally, though the literacy rate has risen to 74.04 per cent according to 2011 Census and the Right to Education is provided as a fundamental right situation is not much better than earlier. If the children have access to good and qualitative education throughout the country uniformly, the problem of education will be solved it is possible only with nationalization of education in India. In India from voters to ministers less educated are more. Less educated ministers are governing intellectual class and intellectual class is suffering with ego. Rest of the things can be inferred to your knowledge.

It is most important to note here that politicians are passionate to start, own and enhance education institutions as a business adventure. It is the main reason for improper implementation of right to education (Constitutional Provision). Further on this reason only the government wanted to fund private schools on behalf of poor entrants of the school.

3.2. Poverty Alleviation

Ministers and bureaucrats failed in implementation of development policies and programmes at both the levels center and state. Many will not utilize the money realized for the specific purpose and not shown interest in developmental activities. This kind of passive approach shows that poverty is one of the vote banks forever. Because, since 1970 a number of programmes¹ have been implemented for alleviation of poverty but situation is not better. To speak about urban poverty there has been a growth of 17.8 million in urban slum population of the country in the last decade, according to a government committee formed to create a "reliable statistical model" of enumerating people living in such areas. The committee headed by Pranob Sen, Principal Advisor to the Planning Commission, states that the projected slum population in the country for the year 2011 would be 93.06 million from the 75.26 million estimated in 2001.² It is estimated that nearly one-fifth of urban India lives in slums. The proportion is regularly increasing. This is viewed as a negative offshoot of urbanization. Slum dwellers are increasing in cities for various reasons like rural poverty, non implementation of socio-economic development programmes, government failure in rehabilitation, bad agricultural practices etc. Socio-economic backwardness of the society is the reason to keep the caste system alive and continuous fights among the backward and forward in any respect of it might be social backwardness or economic backwardness. Furthermore, their perceptions started to frame or decided to frame on the basis of their background like caste, education, status, etc. Rich people are not ready to share with poor and poor losing their confidence with rich. There is no *consensus ad idem* in the society about the constitutional benefits for the poor people. So only the benefits are grabbed by wrong people or failed to the right people.

3.3. Governance Reforms

The success of democracy primarily depends on the efficient functioning of administration and independence of the judiciary. The performance of public administration in India has become very poor may be for the reasons like corruption, inefficiencies, political interference and irresponsiveness. However, sincere officers are there but very few in number and they and their ideologies are also not safe in this system. Regarding the judiciary independency and neutrality are not sufficient. Judiciary is the authority to distribute justice to the public. Therefore, speedier and expedient remedies need to be given to the aggrieved. But today the regular courts are taking more time for the disposal, less prosecution, politicized appointment, promotion and transfer, lack of expertization etc. Appointment and transfer of judges and bureaucrats always in news and shuffle can also be seen with government change. Whenever, court sought assistant of commission or committee, decision delays much. The appointment of head of the Commission or Committee, its report and recommendations all control and regulate by government. As the findings of the commissions have no legal binding force, governments are free to discard them. Implementation of court judgments is also very challenging issue as many will not follow them and nobody is there to question even it as contempt of court for example environment pollution cases. It shows that like King like Citizen. We people are very lethargic to question them. Only very few environmentalists and social activists will fight for it.

3.4. Role of Civil Society

Indian Constitution starts with "We the people of India..." here the question is ourselves it refers to whom? The term '*locus standi*' is expanded to 'Public Interest Litigation' in late eighties and early nineties cases flooded before the courts. It is very welcoming change but it reserved for only few areas like environment, human rights etc. Question is proportion of democratic participation of people in India, when democratic participation increases then more meaningful democracy can work. Democracy can be successful when basic values like equality, freedom, secularism, social justice, accountability and respect for all reflect in their mindset, thinking and behavior. Hence, appreciation for opportunities and proactive role of the citizen play important role in realization of democracy. As there is no proper implementation on constitutional provisions to eradicate poverty, backwardness etc. till the day caste system playing its role in election and become a vote bank. Another important factor is the role of forward class, they criticize the reservation policy, and government facilities for backward class instead of help them. Further creamy layer of the backward also strive for the betterment of their community. Earlier British rule divided and rules us. But today ourselves we are dividing, looting and ruling to ruin everything of our land. It should not happen and we need open our eyes with broad mind set. One thing here to remember is that even today backward unable to get key position for whatever the reason. Kindly read and realize the true spirit of the Preamble of Indian

¹These programmes fall into two broad categories: (i) There are programmes to lift beneficiaries above poverty line by providing them with productive assets or skills or both, so that they can employ themselves usefully and earn greater income. (ii) Programmes are also being implemented to provide temporary wage employment for the poor and the landless. Similarly, the Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY) is a programme for the creation of rural economic infrastructure with employment generation as a secondary objective. The programme is implemented by the village panchayats and since its inception it has generated 27 crore men-days of employment each year. The Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) covers 1,778 drought-prone, desert, tribal and hill area blocks. The programme was designed to provide employment in the form of manual work in the lean agricultural season. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) is being implemented to enhance the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

Constitution... WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity;

and to promote among them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation;

We had seen the Integrity and Fraternity to achieve independence before 1947 but today it is completely missing today. It is very unfortunate to state here that everything is personalized and politicalized. It means the will of the people has failed to deliver responsive, caring or efficient governance.

Media is considered as fourth pillar of democracy. It should work like agent of modern democracy to help in strengthening the economic, social and political fabric of the nation. Media is diluting the judging capacity of the public for many reasons like commercialization of news, welfare of journalists, strapped economy on media performance, satellite tyranny etc. In continuation media is also succumb of politics, caste and rich.

4. Conclusion

Indian democracy is moving in right direction with many changes like coalition governments, voter's unpredictable behavior, significance role of electoral commission, and the local government which gives political democracy to the poor. With political democracy we need to achieve social and economic democracy in this the greedy world. It is a great challenge to Indian democracy. Right to Education Act and Right to Information Act are more explicit in nature, but not sufficient actual participation from government and public is required. If Right to Information Act works it will drastically change the level of official transparency and create more honest bureaucracy. In concern of Right to Education Act, governance and judiciary could do better job even without this Act. The Right to Education Act mandates 25% seats in all schools to be reserved for the economically disadvantaged children for reason best known to the Parliamentarians. Further, the same has been endorsed by the Judiciary.

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