

# The New Challenges of Indian Democracy: Role of Political Parties

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## ABSTRACT

*India is the largest democracy in the world. In the last 7 decades it has worked successfully well to some extent. But in modern India it has to face many challenges that need to be tackled in order to ensure true 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 behaviour. In this time it has achieved some remarkable successes but also failed in significant ways. While economic growth has been rapid over recent decades. These challenges may include: social and economic inequalities, poverty and unemployment, illiteracy and ignorance, casteism, communalism, population explosion, regionalism, corruption and terrorism etc. India needs to develop new proposals to reform democracy. Owing to the diverse geographical, social and cultural concerns, India has nurtured the growth of the multi-party system. Over a period of time, national and regional political parties became the vital constituents of the world's largest democracy, India. Whether the proliferation of parties has helped the country's cause, is a different debate altogether. However, it's important to know what exactly these political parties stand for and what role do they play within the parliamentary democracy. In this paper, the author has attempted to study and analyse the existing democratic setup in India and suggest necessary reforms in order to ensure a sustainable democracy in India..*

**Key words:** Communalism, Corruption, Insurgency, Democracy, Issues and Challenges.

## Introduction

Democracy means rule by the people to ensure that every citizen takes part in the decisionmaking process either directly or indirectly through elected representatives. India is the largest democracy in the world. In the last more than 6 decades it has worked successfully well to some extent. But in modern India, it has to face many challenges that need to be tackled in order to ensure true democracy. These challenges may include: overpopulation, poverty and the huge gap between rich and the poor, proper sanitation, corruption, illiteracy and right to education, violence communal, religious etc., terrorism, naxalism, caste related violence, law and order, economic reforms, good governance, voter turnout, relationship with neighbouring countries, diplomatic issues, protection of human rights, women's and children rights and right to development, implementation of various welfare schemes, protection of freedoms guaranteed under the Constitution of India, environment protection, apathy of media, frequent dharnas, strikes, walkouts, no cooperative movements, etc. India needs to develop new legal, political and social proposals to reform democracy. Law plays important role in political reformation and may help to prevent wrong practices and encourage good ones. But mere legal changes alone do not help as the changes in laws may sometimes prove

counterproductive and may result into negative impact on society. Therefore, besides good laws, the political ruling and the opposition must work in with a true parliamentary spirit toward meeting these challenges and hence restoring the true democracy in India. To ensure this Right to Information Act is the best example that serves as a watchdog against abuse of democratic principles by the politicians and the bureaucrats. In this paper, the author has attempted to study and analyse the existing democratic setup in India and suggest necessary reforms in order to ensure and sustainable democracy in India. The paradox of our times is that we hail the victory of democracy while lamenting the fact that in many countries parliament - the central institution of democracy is facing a crisis of legitimacy. The executive branch dominates the agenda, international cooperation and globalization have led to decision making that lacks democratic control, and people question whether current political processes are really able to produce parliaments that can represent their interests in all their diversity. The early years of the twenty-first century have witnessed a marked paradox.

The country does not have an extensive welfare system, although it has made a greater effort to create one of late. And, defying democratic theory, a great participatory upsurge has marked Indian

politics, a phenomenon that is only beginning to be understood by scholars and observers: since the early 1990s, India's plebeian orders have participated noticeably more in elections than its upper and middle classes. At the time, the Indian National Congress government was embroiled in several high-profile corruption scandals, and ordinary government business had essentially stopped. Bureaucrats and ministers sat on files, afraid to approve anything that might get them in trouble. India had gone from being the world's most promising emerging market to a dysfunctional mess. Last May, a frustrated, tired nation voted in droves for a regime change and a tough new prime minister: Narendra Modi. In the wake of Narendra Modi's overwhelming victory in India's recent elections, commentators have noted the many, daunting challenges facing the new prime minister of the world's most populous democracy.

### **Role of Political Parties in India**

In Indian political history, for almost sixty years it had been led by the Indian National Congress (INC) party. The other major opposing party to the congress was and is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Besides these two, there are also some regional parties which represent their own states. Then after some years came the era of coalition parties, where in the case if any one party did not enjoy the full majority in the elections would take the support of the other parties to form the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). The most important problem in Indian politics is that at least more than a fifth of parliament members face some criminal charges and around 40 of them are accused with serious criminal charges. In Indian political setup, there are several parties at national as well as regional levels. Each party however small is playing its own role of looking after the welfare of either themselves or the people that they represent. For example, the way the present campaigning of the coming general election of blame games between some of the parties is going on.

### **Role of Opposition**

A democracy operates on the basis that there is room for choice all the way up to the selection of the government. This implies that the legislature, which makes the laws for the country, must itself provide an opportunity for various views to be heard throughout the term. These views should encompass not only those on the government benches, but also those who are opposed to the policies underlying the ways of operation. In other words, lawfully elected representatives of the

people must be able to present and discuss alternative policy options even if they are not part of the government and do not have an immediate way of making their plans succeed. In present time opposition plays only negative role in India. In general, if the government commands a large share of the seats with unchecked majority control of the legislature, policy outcomes will reflect the government's position. If the government has relatively fewer seats and the opposition has bargaining resources, then policy making could be shaped by the opposition. The opposition's ultimate sanctioning weapon is that it might be a credible alternative in the next general election. But it can be argued that in the practice of parliamentary opposition in India, the opposition uses Parliament more to impugn the credibility of governments than to exercise accountability for the sake of good governance. Virtually all opposition parties are reactive rather than proactive, reflecting the extreme organizational weakness of Indian political parties. Third, and unsurprisingly, opposition parties tend to focus on issues judged to have significant immediate political pay-offs rather than on the day-to-day functioning of government. Opposition parties are likely, therefore, to focus more of their attention on political scandals such as financial scams and corruption cases, where they can attack individuals rather than try to force institutional and systemic changes. But perhaps the principal reason that parliamentary opposition parties in India do not scrutinize the day-to-day functions of government with any seriousness is that political parties in India are flimsy institutions. The opposition in any parliamentary system faces another dilemma. It cannot always oppose the

Government because it may be blamed for neither obstructing business; nor can it get away with the credit for enacting legislation. The opposition is most effective when it neither colludes with nor obstructs government. Arguably, this dilemma hampers opposition parties immensely in India's Parliament. There are numerous examples of parties that will often not vote for legislation, not because they disagree with the contents of a particular bill, but because they do not want the government to be able to garner credit for passing it. Given the fragmented nature of parliamentary composition in India in recent years, the pace of legislation is extremely slow, even when there is substantive agreement among political parties. However, in the Indian case, the problem is more acute and has worsened in recent years. Parliament in the public mind is essentially a site

for adversarial combat rather than of deliberative clarity.

### **Role of People**

Our intelligentsia points to ignorant illiterate populace as the basic cause of our degeneration and related problems. They rant: we, Indians, with our illiterate masses, aren't matured for democracy. We elect the wrong persons as our representatives/governors because of the lack of literacy and awareness. Many of them are trying to enhance awareness of the masses on the fronts they think is necessary to regenerate India. So literacy or academic qualification is not the scale of integrity. Education can polish one's talents, give more knowledge about the world, but would not change his innate traits. It can make a crook a sophisticated crook; it would enable one to enter into higher echelons of the society and commit crimes of much higher proportions with a limited impunity using loopholes in the law and society. They have time and again demonstrated this wisdom, and resolve to use it judiciously, while using their voting rights to elect representatives to representative bodies. From where the voters, even with the highest possible awareness, would elect a competent one as his representative when the election arena is full of lackeys, sycophants and vicious manipulators only? If we have to get desirable results after democratic elections, if we intent our voters to elect competent men of integrity and character as their representatives/governors, first we should make sure that the candidates in the fray are of such qualities. Since about 2005-6, the Maoists have become the main target of the Indian state, with thousands of paramilitary forces being poured into the areas where they are strong, and the prime minister repeatedly referring to them as India's biggest security threat. As a consequence, armed conflict is occurring across large parts of central India and is taking several hundred lives on an annual basis. In the state of Chhattisgarh, which is the epicentre of the war, sovereignty is contested over large parts of terrain. There are three main perspectives on the Maoist issue. The first, which is the security perspective, equates the Maoists with terrorists. India's home ministry has put out half-page advertisements in all the national newspapers, proclaiming alongside photos of corpses that Naxal are nothing but cold-blooded murderers'. This perspective is blind to the history, ideology, and actual practices of the Maoists. The second, which is the dominant liberal perspective, epitomized by an expert group constituted by the Indian government's Planning Commission, might be labelled the root causes perspective. According to this view, poverty and

lack of development'(here meaning employment), and the want of primary services like education, are to blame for pushing people to support the Maoists. Maoist cadre are from Adivasi or Dalit communities, middle peasants and upper castes play a significant role, especially in leadership positions. The third, which is the revolutionary perspective held by the Maoists themselves and their sympathizers, portrays the movement as a product of structural violence. While they describe people as forced into resistance and armed struggle, there is equally an emphasis on active agency and sacrifice, contrary to the root causes perspective that sees people as mainly passive victims.

### **The 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 behaviour. In other way it can be termed as a genuine democracy only when it fulfils 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.

#### **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.

#### **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.

### **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. 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.

### **Basic Elements of the 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:

### **Poverty Improvement**

Ministers and bureaucrats failed in implementation of development policies and programmes at both the levels centre 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 programmes<sup>1</sup> 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. 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.

### **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.

### Conclusion

In the end, the challenges before democracy is a never ending debate, the more one writes or speaks the lesser it will be. So, what is most important is that we should change our attitudes and mind-set. We should try to overcome our self-centred nature. Lowest layer the grass root institutions and the apex of the pyramid with a single seat the highest power, being the seat of its Chief executive PM/President. Unfortunately those doors in Indian Democracy are tampered to malfunction they have reversed their function: Attracting and filtering in the tainted opportunistic sycophantic lackeys only and purging any one exhibiting a grain of competence, integrity and independence during their time at the concerned layer. These attempts will continue forever, motivated by their competent leaders, catalyzing more social evolution and progress in vibrant societies. As the elected body that represents society in all its diversity, parliaments have a unique responsibility for reconciling the conflicting interests and expectations of different groups and communities through the presented in the media. We, nearly thousand million people, boasting inheritance of a rich heritage, are performing much below our potential. We have surely made some progress in the last 50 years. But our achievements, be it in agriculture, industry, technology, arts, sports, diplomacy or any other faculty of life, are far below our potentials when compared with other nations with much less potentials, who had been at par or behind us in 1950s and 1960s. We became a nation of under achievers, under performers, hypocrites, cheats and beggars. We are sending our sons and daughters abroad begging for jobs submitting ourselves to slavery, Government is begging for help in the form of monetary, technical, diplomatic support from other nations, international organizations and multinationals and from individuals even. Any dream of eliminating communal forces from a society is utopian. What we can try is to keep them in check through dexterous management and inspiring the society to grow to identify with the greater national identity. Indian democracy is moving in right direction with many changes like coalition

governments, voter's unpredictable behaviour, 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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