

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN PRESENT INDIAN DEMOCRACY**SANTOSH MALLAPPA GANIGER, Dr. K.C. SURESH**¹Research scholar, Tumkur University, Tumkursantoshganiger9@gmail.com²Associate Professor, Department of studies Research in Political science
Tumkur University, Tumkur**ABSTRACT**

Hi Dears, We are proud to be the largest democracy in the world. For more than sixty five years we have witnessed the conduct of successful elections, peaceful changes of government at the Centre and in the States, people exercising freedom of expression, movement and religion. India has also been developing and transforming economically and socially many Western governments continue to point to India's status as the world's largest democracy as one of the key justifications for deepening engagement with the country. Meanwhile, New Delhi employs its democratic credentials as part of its claim to an expanded global role. In this context, it is important to understand what India's democratic status means for its foreign policy and the nature (and limits) of its engagement with the West.

Long back, former President of the United States of America, Abraham Lincoln said, "Democracy is a government of the people, for the people, and by the people." The term 'democracy' comes from the Greek word demokratia which means "rule of the people". It was coined from two words: demos that means "people" and Kratos which refers to "power". That is, in a democracy the power rests with the people. This meaning is based on the experiences of the governments that existed in some of the Greek city-states, notably Athens. And, today also, democracy is defined as a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodic free elections. When you examine the definitions of democracy, as suggested above, you will find that most of those definitions define democracy as a form of government which is run by the elected representatives.

KEYWORDS: Need of the Study, Background of the study area, Importance of Democracy, Opportunities for Citizens' Role, Principles and working democracy in India, challenges and Conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy is often said to mean 'rule by the people'. See here example of this is any system of government in which people elected representatives into parliament. Democracy helps in maintaining law and order with concept of power sharing and it helps citizens to choose their

leaders to run the government by free and fair elections. Democracy provides equal rights among citizens on the basis of caste, religion and sex and so on.

In recent years, criminalization of politics in India has become a debatable issue. There have been allegations that there are some elements in politics who do not have faith in democratic values and practices. They 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. Criminalization of politics is the very negation of democratic values and has no place in a democratic set up. Democracy can be strengthened by adopting and promoting democratic values and shunning criminal activities. Recently, the judiciary, while taking a serious note of criminal tendencies in politics, has showed signs of adopting remedial measures to apply a serious check on such elements. The Central government and many State governments have been taking steps to address this issue effectively. This is a matter of great satisfaction and a healthy sign for the successful functioning of democracy in our country. We, as awakened citizens and as voters of the largest democracy in the world, can also contribute by discouraging such persons who have a criminal background, from contesting elections.

India has long been wary of engaging in overt democracy promotion, concerned that such activities would be perceived as a form of interventionism that challenges the sovereignty of partner countries. India's democracy promotion is often subsumed under broader nation- and state-building building efforts. The country's firm adherence to principles of non-interference and sovereignty also means that democracy promotion will typically be limited to top-down technical assistance and institution-building activities rather than grassroots assistance to civil society groups. Unlike the West, India remains reluctant to use democratic transition as a condition of development aid. More assertive actions such as sanctions and regime change will generally be limited to countries within South Asia, and have often been driven more by geopolitical considerations than by a genuine desire to promote democracy. A democratic nation is one where the citizens have the right to elect their government. It is sometimes also said to be the "rule of the majority". Several countries around the world run democratic governments, but India takes pride in being the largest democracy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- Understand the meaning of democracy in its different aspects;
- appreciate the introduction and development of democracy in India;
- identify major problems and challenges being faced by Indian democracy;
- recognize the corrective measures for improving the Indian democratic system; and
- explain the roles of citizens in making an efficient and successful democracy.

METHODOLOGY

Democracy provides a method for dealing with differences and conflicts because different people have different opinions and interests. However, there are free and fair elections. In a democracy, no one is a permanent winner. Different groups can live together in harmony and peace and so on....

NEED OF THE STUDY

This question is being asked a lot more as democracy is threatened by various forces around the world. Some question the value of the popular vote when it leads to seismic shifts such as Brexit, and the election of demagogues who threaten liberal values.

Even the American system, for a long time the exemplar of democratic freedoms, seems so polarized that it is in danger of becoming impotent, its ability to endure technological, demographic, and cultural change in doubt.

Meanwhile, over the last 30-50 years, a more technocratic, uniform form of politics has taken hold in the European Union (EU), where democracy is arguably less responsive to citizens and large elements of the population feel excluded from the process of government.

More recently, non-democratic, authoritarian governments such as China have been praised for enduring the COVID-19 pandemic better than democracies, because they are better able to compel specific behaviour from citizens without concern for individual liberties, or dissent from a free press. All this may question the need for democracy. But most authoritarian systems are hampered by structural weaknesses: large, disenfranchised minority groups foster a sense of injustice; reliance on 'strongmen' figures makes the transfer of power potentially violent; and vested interests are protected from popular demands for change.

EXPLANATION

India's constitution was adjusted to describe it as a secular state during the 1975 emergency, and a later court ruling found that India has been secular since independence. But India is understood to be a deeply religious country, with diverse religions represented in its population. The constitution is secular in that it prohibits the persecution of individuals for their religious beliefs, but it does not specifically separate church and state in the fashion of the United States constitution.

Religion is an important factor in Indian politics with politicians courting votes by caste or religious affiliation. For more than a century, Hindu nationalists have called for the country to be redefined as a Hindu homeland. After gaining independence from Britain in 1947, the

government was initially dominated by the Indian National Congress Party ('Congress'). The party was heavily identified with independence leader, Mahatma Gandhi, who was assassinated by a Hindu nationalist in 1948. Jawaharlal Nehru was prime minister from independence and served for 17 years. Congress' electoral dominance would last for the next four decades.

India is an incredibly diverse nation with many regional variations, religions and languages. Some external observers of India expected the country would break up as a result. In fact, Congress managed these differences effectively, redrawing state boundaries along linguistic lines and forming a coalition of regional powerbrokers, rather than attempting to impose a centralized state run out of Delhi.

In the 1970s Indira Gandhi broke with this successful formula and attempted to concentrate power in the central government. When these efforts were resisted, she declared a state of emergency in 1975, arresting journalists, politicians and other opponents. In 1977 she lifted the emergency, held elections, and was defeated by a coalition, giving India its first non-Congress government.

Though that government quickly failed, the election fractured the Congress coalition that had held since independence, creating regional Congress breakaway parties. It also empowered parties like the communists, whose Left Front would go on to rule the state of West Bengal, bordering Bangladesh, for three decades.

Support for Congress gradually eroded over the decades, but the party has remained reliant on the Gandhi dynasty – Indira and her descendants. (It is worth noting that Indira was Nehru's daughter and was not related to Mahatma Gandhi. She was married to Feroze Gandhi – who was not related to Mahatma either).

Rajiv Gandhi led Congress to power again in the 1985 election, which followed the assassination of his mother Indira in 1984. But this proved a one-off rather than a return to the dominance of old.

25 years of coalition governments followed, sometimes led by Congress and some by other parties, from 1989 up until 2014. The 2009-2014 Congress-led coalition, led by Manmohan Singh, was increasingly portrayed by political opponents as representing a decadent, English-speaking elite lacking vision for India.

India grew relatively strongly during the period, but the sense that a more authoritarian form of government might deliver more was common, particularly among the urban middle class.

The definition of democracy is incomplete unless it is defined in social and individual contexts as well. In the present age, it means more than a mere form of government. In its comprehensive

form, democracy means, (A) a form of government, (B) a type of state, (C) a pattern of social system, (D) a design of economic order, and (E) a way of life and culture. Therefore, when we say Indian democracy, we mean not only that its political institutions and processes are democratic but also that the Indian society and every Indian citizen is democratic, reflecting basic democratic values of equality, liberty, fraternity, secularism and justice in social sphere and individual behaviour.

IMPORTANT OF DEMOCRACY

When talking about the importance of democracy it is important to define it accurately. Democracy is popular sovereignty – in Abraham Lincoln’s words, ‘government of the people, by the people, for the people’. At its heart is the concept of the population choosing a government through regular, free, and fair elections. Democracy has played a vital role in the story of civilization, helping transform the world from power structures of monarchy, empire, and conquest into popular rule, self-determination, and peaceful co-existence. Abraham Lincoln said that government of the people,

In Europe and the English-speaking world it is often assumed democracy naturally takes the form of liberal democracy – popular sovereignty but limited by a constitution which guarantees individual freedoms (such as speech) and rights (such as to a fair trial). Crucially these essential freedoms are not subject to a democratic vote.

In fact, democracy does not necessarily have to be liberal. Certain nations today have illiberal democracies where voting continues but liberal characteristics, such as an independent judiciary and free press, have been compromised.

Defenders of liberal democracy say this actually makes these societies inherently undemocratic, as stripping away liberal guarantees leads to intimidation and coercion by the state, undermining elections.

The guarantees of liberal democracy are intended to ensure no ethnic, geographic, class, or business interest dominates or exploits others to an unreasonable degree, and that there is fair and universal consent gained for government policies.

APPRECIATION OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR CITIZENS ROLE

The opportunities as democratic citizens are available in all democracies, but they vary from one democratic system to another. Indian democracy in the modern sense began after a long period of colonial rule. Although the democratic system started just after independence in 1947, its socio-cultural settings were and still are not in tune with the democratic culture. India is a vast multi-cultural, multi-lingual, truly plural society, which in many respects still carries the characteristics

of traditionalism. At the same time it is trying to absorb the values of modern democracy. Even now many think that the government has to rule and do everything, and if things are not happening in an expected manner, it is only the government which is to be blamed.

As you know, the democratic government in our country is run by the representatives chosen by us. In that sense, every citizen is responsible for how the governments functions at different levels: national, state and local. And hence, every citizen has to play a critical role and use every opportunity for doing so. As Indian citizens are we doing it? Let us consider. Major opportunities for roles of citizens may be as follows:

(a) Participation The key role of citizens in a democracy is to participate in public life. The most commonly observed opportunity of participation is exercising the right to vote during elections. And in order to vote wisely it is necessary that each citizen listens to and knows the views of different parties and candidates, and then makes his or her own decision on whom to vote for. It is also learnt that in many cases the percentage of voting is still low. The Election Commission is doing its best to educate the people about importance of participation in elections. Participation in a democratic polity, however, is not confined simply to participation in elections only. A vital form of participation comes through membership of political parties and more importantly, active membership in independent non-governmental organizations, that are known as “civil society organizations.” These organizations represent a variety of interests of different groups such as women, students, farmers, workers, doctors, teachers, business owners, religious believers, human rights activists. Such organizations and people’s movements help to bring political awareness about different issues among the people.

(b) Making the System Accountable Participation in the political process is not enough. Citizens have to make the democratic system responsive and responsible. The Constitution makes the executive responsible to the legislature, but citizens are needed to ensure that the Parliamentarians, Members of State Legislatures and their representatives in Panchayati Raj and Municipal Institutions are accountable. The instruments created by the Right to Information Act, 2005 in our country enable citizens to play their role effectively. Citizens have an obligation to become informed about that public issues, to watch carefully how their political leaders and representatives use their powers, and to express their own opinions and interests. When citizens find that the government is not living up to its promises; they can point it out through media, make recommendations and demands accountability from the government. If the government still fails to fulfill promises, citizens may protest, carry out peaceful satyagraha, civil disobedience or non-cooperation campaigns to make the government accountable.

C) Fulfilling Obligations We should realize that citizenship is more than voting or making the system accountable. Many people tend to regard democracy as a system where literally everything is allowed. And every person has the freedom to do whatever one desires. This often leads to a complete chaos that devastates the order of the society rather than improving it. In that

way it leads to the opposite effects of democracy. A citizen has to accept that freedom is never absolute. If you have a right to do certain things, you have also the responsibility to ensure that your actions do not infringe upon the rights of others.

PRINCIPLES AND WORKING DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

A democratic nation is one where the citizens have the right to elect their government. It is sometimes also said to be the “rule of the majority”. Several countries around the world run democratic governments, but India takes pride in being the largest democracy.

India had been ruled by several rulers from Mughals to Mauryas. Each of them had its own style of governing the people. It was only after the country got independence from the colonial rule of the Britishers in 1947 that it became a democratic nation. It was then that the people of India, who had suffered tyranny at the hands of the British, attained the right to vote and elect their government for the first time.

Democratic principles of India

- **Sovereign** Sovereign refers to an entity free from any foreign power’s control. The citizens of India enjoy sovereign power to elect their ministers.
- **Socialist:** Socialism means providing social and economic equality to all the citizens of India irrespective of their caste, colour, creed, gender, and religion.
- **Secular:** Secular means the freedom to practice the religion of one’s choice. There is no official state religion in the country.
- **Democratic:** This means the government of India is elected by its citizens. The right to vote is given to all Indian citizens without any discrimination.
- **Republic:** The head of the country is not a hereditary king or queen. An electoral college elects him.

THE WORKING OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

Every citizen of India above the age of 18 years has the right to vote. The Constitution does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of their caste, colour, creed, gender, religion, or education.

There are seven national parties in the country, namely, Indian National Congress (INC), BharatiyaJanta Party (BJP), Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India -Marxist (CPI-M), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) and

BahujanSamaj Party (BSP). Besides these, a number of regional parties fight the elections to state legislatures. Elections are held periodically, and people exercise their right to vote to elect their representatives. The government is continually making efforts to encourage more and more people to use their right to vote to choose good governance.

Democracy in India is not merely about giving people the right to vote but ensuring equality in all the spheres of life. While the elections have been happening at the right time and a systematic approach is followed to conduct the same ever since the concept of democracy came into being in India there are many hindrances in the smooth functioning of democracy in the country. These include illiteracy, gender discrimination, poverty, cultural disparity, political influence, casteism, and communalism. All these factors adversely affect democracy in India.

Challenges:

- ❖ Perhaps the greatest challenge democracy faces in India is that it has failed to deliver the kind of sustained economic development enjoyed by neighbours like China over the last four decades. It has also failed to eliminate extreme poverty.
- ❖ Educated elites in more globalized cities like Delhi and Mumbai live completely different lives from India's poorest citizens.
- ❖ There has been considerable development in India since independence, but it has been uneven.
- ❖ Low-wage, low-skilled jobs remain the probable form of employment for millions of young Indians, particularly in poorer, populous states such as Uttar Pradesh, creating a large population of poor disenchanted voters.
- ❖ Indian nationalism and populism have fed off this discontent by scapegoating religious minorities – notably Muslims and Dalits – while increasing pride for many Hindus.
- ❖ Prime Minister Modi and the BJP party represent the Hindu nationalist movement, whose ideology – Hindutva – has remained consistent for a century. Since before independence nationalists have argued that India should be the homeland for South Asia's Hindus, as Pakistan was for its Muslims.
- ❖ The contemporary BJP hopes to consolidate the Hindu community – arguing, not without merit, that caste divisions were artificially exaggerated during the colonial period as part of a divide and rule strategy by the British.
- ❖ Since taking power the BJP has been preoccupied with pursuing this agenda. Hindu nationalists are not concerned about other religions which originate in India, such as Sikhism and Jainism, but its attitude to religions which originate elsewhere, notably Islam and Christianity, is more hostile. The BJP argues that other parties have privileged the minority (Muslim) population, and that it is levelling up the status of Hindus.
- ❖ Kashmir, the only Muslim-majority state in India, was put under lockdown from 2019-2021 and subjected to a communications blackout. The region's autonomous status was revoked, and thousands were arrested, including Kashmiri politicians, activists and separatists.

- ❖ In Assam, a north-eastern state, where illegal immigration is a significant problem and Muslims represent around the third of the population, detention camps have been created for those who cannot prove their Indian citizenship.
- ❖ This followed the Citizenship Amendment Act passed in 2019, which eased citizenship requirements for various religions – but expressly omitted Muslims. 1.9 million Muslims had already been effectively stripped of their citizenship in Assam after being left off India's National Register of Citizens.
- ❖ But the BJP's attempt to remake India has seen political discourse become increasingly polarized, while economic growth has slowed. It has also eroded trust in India's institutions and in basic democratic foundations like the rule of law.
- ❖ Trust in the law is further undermined by India's dysfunctional legal system, which leaves many languishing in detention before trial for 'crimes' including peaceful protest. Meanwhile Amnesty International reports numerous uses of excessive force by India's police and security forces.
- ❖ India also faces several demographic challenges. Decades of selective abortion have led to a significant imbalance between males and females. India is currently undergoing a 'demographic dividend' – a rising working age population. However, it is struggling to generate jobs. Unemployment stands at a 40-year high. Finally, population growth has been higher in poorer northern states than in generally better-educated southern states.
- ❖ Indian democracy faces further challenges because of criminality in the political system. 43 per cent of those who won national parliament seats at the 2019 general election had been charged with a crime of some kind.

Conclusion

Two narratives dominate global discussions about India today: one is on the country's rise as an increasingly prominent geopolitical and economic actor; the other centres on concerns – particularly among India's Western partners – about democratic backsliding. This paper examines the interplay between these two narratives, and more specifically, what India's status as the world's largest democracy means for its global role and relations with the West.

While many Western governments have long held up India's democratic credentials as a key pillar for engagement with the country, Indian foreign policy often appears out of sync with Western democracies. New Delhi rarely employs democracy promotion as an explicit tool of its foreign policy. India is not unique among democratic states in placing pragmatism above principle in the conduct of its foreign policy. But New Delhi's firm adherence to principles of non-interference and sovereignty means that its democracy promotion tends to be pursued more subtly, subsumed under broader development initiatives.

Under the Modi government, the democracy narrative has tilted towards a greater emphasis on promoting good governance through the 'democratization of technology'. With technology

cooperation being a key area of India's engagement with the West, digital public infrastructure (DPI) is an emerging area of collaboration in the Global South. Western governments have thrown their weight behind New Delhi as India competes with China for leadership of the Global South.

The challenge is India's domestic political trajectory. India has become less liberal over the last decade, but it has arguably become better governed. However, the illiberal turn in India's democracy and its more muscular deployment of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) within its foreign policy may complicate a deepening relationship with the West. This will not preclude policy-focused collaboration, but it is likely to place limits on deeper cooperation in sensitive areas such as intelligence sharing. Ultimately, too, it may raise questions about India's claims to offer a worldview that is non-Western but not explicitly anti-Western.

Democracy in India has received appreciation from world over. The right to vote to every citizen of the country has been given without any discrimination on the basis of their caste, colour, creed, religion, gender, or education. However, the country's huge cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity is a major challenge for its democracy. The differences sought to be created out of it are a cause of serious concern. There is a need to curb these divisive tendencies in order to ensure the smooth functioning of democracy in India.

While democracy in India has been appreciated worldwide, there are still miles to go. Factors such as illiteracy, poverty, gender discrimination and communalism that impact the working of democracy in India need to be eradicated in order to allow the citizens to enjoy democracy in true sense.

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