



INDIAN DEMOCRACY: PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: Democracy represents an ideal system where ordinary citizens can significantly contribute both directly and indirectly. India operates as a democratic nation, characterized by principles such as the rule of law, equality, justice, transparency, accountability, and the protection of individual rights and freedoms. The country strives to adhere to these democratic features diligently. Over time, the nature of democracy is evolving, and contemporary democracy differs from its earlier forms, prompting a reevaluation of its definition. Indian democracy is likewise undergoing transformation and confronting various issues and challenges. The primary focus of this article is not to debate the essence of Indian democracy or attempt to redefine it. Instead, this paper aims to explore the specific problems and challenges faced by Indian democracy, illustrated with relevant examples.

Key phrases: Democracy, problems, challenges, India, responsibility, transparency, and more.

Introduction: The topic of democracy in India is not a recent phenomenon. It has endured through a robust legal framework ensuring citizenship rights. One can argue that democracy in India has established deep roots over an extended period. Current public sentiment favours democratic values more than it did following the post-Nehru era. However, Indian democracy is not entirely ideal or flawless; it faces numerous shortcomings. Political parties are often engaged in undemocratic practices, while the general populace lacks a comprehensive understanding of true democratic principles. Many citizens are advocating for undemocratic privileges under the guise of democratic processes. Corruption remains an intrinsic aspect of the Indian democratic framework. It is essential for the citizens of India to recognize that democracy does not equate to mere majoritarianism. The challenges and issues facing Indian democracy include the following:

Rule of Majority: The BJP's campaign for a Hindu Rashtra and the establishment of a Ram temple in Ayodhya have contributed to the perception of democracy primarily in terms of majoritarianism, promoting the interests of Hindus at the expense of minority rights. This trend poses significant risks to the rights of minority communities. The 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid by supporters of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, RSS, and BJP exemplifies this issue. Democracy should not be defined purely by majority rule; rather, it must be a participatory system rooted in the ideals of justice, equality, and freedom. Decisions made by the majority must recognize and respect the rights of minority groups—an essential principle that was disregarded in 1992.

Poverty: Many individuals are enduring extremely harsh living conditions. In the 21st century, India is grappling with the issue of poverty. The nation struggles to meet the basic needs of its citizens. As per Locke's perspective, a contemporary liberal state ought to safeguard the fundamental rights of all its inhabitants, including life, liberty, and property. Many consider a comprehensive approach, such as a poverty alleviation program, to be a viable solution; however, it has not significantly altered the realities faced in India. Tragically, in 2018, three young girls died from starvation in the Mandawali area of Delhi, the eldest being just 8 years old. Combating poverty is essential for the success of democracy in India. It is important to remember that poverty infringes upon human rights. Ensuring economic and social justice is a fundamental responsibility of any democracy. A failure in this regard can lead to the eventual acceptance of authoritarian rule. Social justice remains an elusive goal, and without it, democracy cannot

truly exist. According to the World Bank's estimates from 2005, around 80 percent of India's population lives below the international poverty line of \$2 a day, placing India 80th out of 94 countries assessed.

Accountability should be prioritized not only during election periods but also throughout the entire tenure of any governing authority. M.N. Roy emphasized that for democracy to function effectively, citizens need to consistently exercise their rights rather than doing so sporadically. An active and involved citizenry is essential for the successful realization of participatory democracy. In our nation, democracy faced a temporary regression from June 1975 to March 1977. Political leaders frequently place their accountability to their parties above their responsibility to the general public.

Tolerance: Individuals should have the freedom to express their viewpoints. Freedom of speech holds no value if it does not come with freedom following that speech. Tolerance is very much essential in a free democratic society. Authoritarian regimes cannot accept the expression of ideas that challenge their doctrines and ideologies through writings, plays, music, or art. Intolerance stands in stark contrast to democratic principles. The increasing prevalence of intolerance is concerning. It is not limited to any specific political party, group, or sect. Any critique of Madame Sonia Gandhi and her approach by a member of the Congress party often leads to negative repercussions. Justice Chinnappa Reddy aptly pointed out in the Jehovah's Witnesses case that, "Our tradition teaches tolerance; our philosophy advocates tolerance; our Constitution embodies tolerance. Let us not allow it to be diminished." Conflicts among religious groups are a frequent occurrence in India, which is not supported by democracy or the Indian Constitution.

Leadership: Louis Brandeis wisely points out that 'democracy in any area is a serious endeavor. It is more challenging to sustain than to achieve. Success in any democratic initiative must stem from the individual. The primary requirement is to instigate a transformation in the mindset of the general populace. We need individuals whom Roy describes as 'detached individuals; spiritually liberated individuals.' Effective leadership is crucial for a successful democracy. A leader must be free from corruption and exhibit impartiality without bias. Unfortunately, many Indian political leaders do not embody these qualities. Lalu Prasad Yadav, a former chief minister of Bihar, serves as a notable example of this (The Fodder Scam). India requires a genuine, impartial, and unbiased leader to ensure the success of its democracy.

Elections: Ambedkar stated, "Democracy in India is merely a superficial layer on an inherently undemocratic foundation." During Lok Sabha debates, a legislator from Assam remarked to former Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee, "Sir, you often highlight the swift rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from 2 seats in 1984 to becoming the majority party in 1996. However, sir, not all growth is beneficial; some can be detrimental." When governments act against the interests of the populace, citizens find themselves powerless, having to wait until the next election cycle, which spans five years. There tends to be a lack of interest in the candidates themselves, and individuals are often swayed by party leaders. Issues such as rigging, booth capturing, and intimidation is rampant during elections. India grapples with these challenges, and it must confront them in order to strengthen and perfect its democracy.

Communalism: Communalism stands as a significant issue confronting Indian society today. Religious fanaticism is pervasive, resulting in the loss of thousands of lives and the destruction of property worth crores of rupees. It has emerged as the dominant ideology in contemporary India, with our society showing a troubling propensity for ongoing communal violence, which poses risks for political stability. Communalism undermines India's nationalist identity and represents a grave setback for our secular culture. The Indian Constitution designates India as a secular state, signifying that the government remains neutral in matters of religion, allowing individuals to freely practice their faith without state intervention in favor of any religious group. The term 'secular' was incorporated into the preamble of the Indian Constitution following the 42nd amendment. Unfortunately, religion has become a crucial tool for political maneuvering in India. Political parties, whether BJP, TMC, or Congress, often engage in similar tactics, playing on religious sentiments. Minority religious communities in India feel increasingly insecure. The Indian State is expected to treat all citizens equally, but this is not always mirrored in practice. Consequently, this remains a significant challenge for Indian democracy.

Existence of Institutions: Democracy inherently champions the establishment of institutions. Within a democratic framework, these institutions can advance their functions through non-violent methods, thereby strengthening the democratic system significantly. It is essential for individuals to adhere to the rules and regulations set forth by these institutions, as their roles and responsibilities are clearly delineated among them. To meet the needs and expectations of its citizens, the state must take necessary actions, acknowledging that it is but one of many institutions. Unfortunately, political leaders often attempt to diminish the role of these institutions, seeking to render them inactive or ineffective.

Lack of Moral Values Among Political Leaders: India's parliamentary democracy is currently facing a profound crisis marked by a decline in moral values, which have historically served as our guiding principles. The rise in incidents of electoral malpractice such as booth capturing, violence, and even the kidnapping or assassination of candidates poses a serious threat to the very foundation of parliamentary democracy. Nonetheless, despite these challenges, India has demonstrated remarkable resilience in maintaining its democratic structure. The successful organization of regular elections for the Lok Sabha, State Legislatures, and other democratic entities, along with active citizen engagement in the electoral process, underscores the public's unwavering faith and trust in the democratic system.

Conclusion: It is time to engage in a conversation about a necessary transformation. Now is the appropriate moment to reassess our dedication to a government that genuinely reflects the will of the people. Clearly, our current democratic structure is lacking in this regard. While democracy in India has not facilitated a revolutionary leap forward, it has ushered in a different form of democratic progress. Over the past century, we have witnessed a gradual broadening of democracy's meaning, evolving from basic political freedoms to social and economic rights, ultimately striving for liberation across multiple dimensions from class, caste, and patriarchal oppression.

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