



PARTICIPATORY & REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY AND FUTURE OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Participatory democracy is a process of collective decision making that combines elements from both direct and representative democracy: Citizens have the power to decide on policy proposals and politicians assume the role of policy implementation. The aim of this paper is to compare both democracies i.e., participatory and representative along with operation of both democracies. This paper also deals about the scope of future of Participatory Democracy in India.

KEYWORDS : Collective, Democracy, Participatory, Policy implementation, Representative

Democracy

A democracy is a type of government that is run with the input of its citizens, either directly or indirectly. It contrasts with other types of government that are run by individuals or small groups of high-ranking people. Many governments have adopted democracy in varying forms and to varying degrees. Most of these governments are representative democracies, in which the citizens elect representatives to run the government on their behalf and vote on matters such as the passing of laws. The difference between representative democracies and participatory democracies is that in participatory democracies, all eligible citizens can vote on these matters themselves.¹

Democracy is a type of government which is chosen by the people by means of a majority or plurality vote. It may be participatory or representative. Both forms of government are based on the ideas of informed choice by the electorate.² Today, democracy is equated with representative govt. based on free elections of political elites that rule on the citizens' behalf.³

I. Participatory Democracy

Participatory democracy is a process emphasizing the broad participation of constituents in the direction and operation of political systems. Etymological roots of democracy

(Greek *demos* and *kratos*) imply that the people are in power and thus that all democracies are participatory. However, participatory democracy tends to advocate more involved forms of citizen participation than traditional representative democracy.⁴

Factions can become political parties in participatory democracy. However, there are no elected representatives in a participatory democracy. There are only government offices to be filled, by the direct choice of the electoral. This means that people who seek government office are usually more independent and less tied to party policy than in representative democracy. In general, the established support of a political party is less important in participatory democracy than in representative democracy. All forms of participatory democracy break down when the groups become too large. Participatory democracy becomes unwieldy when a diverse group is larger than a few hundred people, or when a like-minded group is larger than a few thousand people.⁵

Participatory Democracy is the form of Democracy that is favoured by Globalists who inhabit the United Nations and the EU.⁶ According to the *UN eminent persons' panel* – "Traditional democracy aggregates citizens by communities of neighbourhood (their electoral districts), but in participatory democracy citizens aggregate in communities of interest. And thanks to modern information and communication technologies these communities of interest can be global as well as local!"⁷

In a participatory democracy, also called a direct democracy, every citizen plays an active role in the government. Many people believe

that for this type of government to be successful, it must be in a localized region with a relatively small population. This is because large numbers of eligible citizens might clog the workings of the government, sparking endless debates and votes but never actually achieving anything.

A nationwide participatory democracy might be difficult to manage, although many people are hopeful that modern technology will allow citizens to have greater participation in government. Many small towns within representative democracies use a form of direct democracy at their town meetings. Allowing each citizen on the town level a vote and a role in the government is believed to lead to a more active, caring and interconnected community.⁸

A real democracy, however, is a direct and participatory democracy, in which all citizens have the possibility and the right to participate in the decisions that affect our lives and our communities. While the powers that be and mainstream media and pundits argue that such a citizen-based democracy is not possible or even desirable, there exist in fact a range of new institutions and experiments — as well as some old ones — that show that a direct and participatory democracy is both possible and feasible today. These democratic innovations, however scattered and limited, could — if improved, strengthened and spread — become the tools for a radical democratization of society.⁹

Participatory democracy perspectives argue for the broad participation of the public in environmental and other forms of public decision making. The primary objective is to involve broad cross sections of the American public in decision making to rebuild a sense of community and to restore a capacity for community self-efficacy among publics in those communities. At a structural level, however, participatory democracy is faced with several challenges. Critiques are often framed in terms of the relative strengths of the dominant alternative paradigm of public decision making, that is, representative democracy.¹⁰

Participatory democracy strives to create opportunities for all members of a population to make meaningful contributions to decision-making, and seeks to broaden the range of people who have access to such opportunities. Since so much information must be gathered for the overall decision-making process to succeed, technology may provide important forces leading to the type of empowerment needed for participatory models, especially those technological tools that enable community narratives and correspond to the accretion of knowledge. Effectively increasing the scale of participation, and translating small but effective participation groups into small world networks, are areas currently being studied.¹¹ Other advocates have emphasised the importance of face to face meetings, warning that an overreliance on technology can be harmful.¹²

Some scholars argue for refocusing the term on community-based

activity within the domain of civil society, based on the belief that a strong non-governmental public sphere is a precondition for the emergence of a strong liberal democracy.¹³ These scholars tend to stress the value of separation between the realm of civil society and the formal political realm.¹⁴ In 2011, considerable grassroots interest in participatory democracy was generated by the Occupy movement.¹⁵

Participatory democracy means that all the people who will be affected (ie all stakeholders) should be involved when policies and plans are made, put into action, monitored and evaluated. But different stakeholders will have different ways of understanding what is happening in the world. We therefore have to organise meetings where all points of view get a fair hearing. This means that a complete set of claims, concerns and issues can be drawn up as a basis for negotiation and decision making.

There will be problems when people from different backgrounds come together. Imagine for example an illiterate old woman from a rural area sitting at a table with a university educated young man in a three piece suit. Everybody will have to learn to respect differences and to communicate effectively. Experts will have to 'popularise' the results of their research and Civil Society Organisations (CSO) will have to get better at policy analysis and at advocacy and lobbying.

There will also be problems of 'legitimacy'. What does a CSO representative represent? This will vary. But the important thing in participatory democracy is not to have a vote but to have a voice. If you have a strong argument and you present it well then you will influence the people who have the power to vote.¹⁶ The participatory democracy model also allows citizens to prioritize what is important to them, rather than relying on representatives to address issues for them and decide what is important.

II. Representative Democracy

In a representative democracy, members of a local governed group choose a representative to speak for them and represent their interests at a higher levels of government. Together, these representatives usually make governing decisions at higher levels of government by voting among themselves, although they may also use consensus and compromise.

The representative may be typical of the governed group or exceptional. The people may choose him to make informed decisions on their behalf, accepting that he may know or learn information that they do not have.

As factions become more organized, representative democracy develops into partisan democracy. In an established representative partisan democracy, the possible representatives are usually chosen in advance by the members of each party. The electorate is then presented with the choice between each party's chosen candidate.¹⁷

In a representative democracy, certain people is established as eligible voters based on their age or other qualifications. Eligible voters then elect representatives to serve as government officials, such as members of a chamber, senate or parliament. These officials typically are elected by voters in a certain area, such as a region of a country. An elected official represents the citizens of his or her area and tacitly agrees to serve their interests. Often, a representative must balance competing interests in his or her jurisdiction and will try to satisfy the greatest number of his or her constituents.

To help serve the needs of their constituency, representatives who serve in the national government typically maintain regional offices so that their voters can communicate with them. Individual voters often contact their representatives to encourage them to vote a certain way on a bill or to push through a specific piece of legislation. Some of these measures might be voted on directly by the citizens, in the form of propositions on the ballot. In addition, many representative democracies also permit referendums — pieces of legislation that are proposed directly by the people. If citizens can

get enough signatures on a referendum to indicate a certain level of public interest, it could be placed on the ballot during an election.¹⁸

Representative democracy is where we vote for politicians and political parties to make decisions on our behalf. This will always be necessary. But, in our complicated modern world, the system needs to be supported. Ordinary people have to form pressure groups to make sure that their particular needs and concerns are dealt with. We can think of this 'direct action' as participatory democracy.¹⁶

'US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton said a move towards a participatory government [my emphasis] has to be initiated but cautioned that the Egyptian establishment should make sure there is no political vacuum in the process of transition'. In the United Kingdom we lived in a representative democracy where constituents elected their representatives to take up issues on their behalf in Westminster. What has become clear in recent decades is that Governments may change colour but there is no difference in policies between the competing political parties. Neither do they honour their manifesto promises. Your vote no longer counts. Does the style of 'participatory government' that Clinton is promoting for Egypt already exist in the UK?¹⁹

At least implicitly, the alternative representative democracy model often asserts that individual citizens do not have the time, knowledge, or interest to participate in civil society activities (cf. Moote and McClaran 1997; Pierce et al. 1992). Individual citizens, according to this perspective, tend to be less understanding of complex ecological issues, may have little time or motivation to learn the issues, and so may not be likely to understand how alternatives relate to their preferences compared to issue experts (cf. Heberlein 1976). In the face of these challenges, a representative democracy model suggests that individuals overcome intellectual, motivational, and time-related resource barriers by supporting interest groups, such that the distribution of groups in policy debates tends to fairly represent the actually underlying distribution of interest in a given time in society (Pierce et al. 1992). The principal claim of an interest group model lies theoretically in the assertion that it can achieve representativeness more efficiently and without distortion through interest-group participation.²⁰ Representative democracy is still important. What has changed is that ordinary people have to be more active in influencing the decisions that are made. If they find an issue that is being missed by the system then they must form groups and alliances to collect information and make arguments. They can then use these as the basis of an advocacy and lobbying campaign. These popular campaigns are not always welcomed by powerful people who want to defend existing interests and systems. But there are many successful examples of campaigns at local, national and even global level.¹⁶

But Representative democracy system is now in a deep crisis. In established representative democracies, the trust in political elites and conventional institutions is crumbling. Participation in elections is shrinking, and political parties are losing their members. In the old "well-developed democracies" of Europe, the streets are boiling as millions protest against unpopular and brutal austerity policies imposed on them from above. More and more people are now realizing that their elected representatives do not represent them. Rather, governments of both left and right bow to the dictates of the big banks, the financial institutions and the multinational corporations and their powerful lobbies. In this situation, the ballot has little meaning because we have no real choice. We can only change political elites that rule us, but we do not have the right to decide upon the development of the society in which we live.

III. Future of Participatory Democracy in India

The future of participatory democracy lies in educating people and recognising their rights to food, education and lot more. "Political movements should act as educators and watchdogs. There is need for political education outside the political parties. Space for political education is very important. It was out of this space that the

Right to Information Act and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme(MNREGS) were conceived,

All agitations, like the one in Koodamkulam and another in New Delhi of Anna Hazare anti corruption movement, are part of political education. People should be continuously educated as the social issues are changing. Then only they would have 'informed choices'.

People should be provided public platforms to express their views. Poor people cannot come out and speak to those in power unless they are facilitated for the same. Participatory democracy can be successful only when political and social movements operate in dialectics with political parties. Political parties are also very important like political movements. While in political movements, the first thing is to act and then speak it is the contrary in political parties. The media, the Fourth Estate in a democracy, is not also independent now as the corporates have gained control over it. The media presents only news which they are interested. "The people can't be a part of the system unless there is transparency and accountability"

A radical direct and participatory democracy will not be handed down to us by the elites, but has to be struggled for by ordinary citizens and social movements. As Occupy Oakland activists Gabriel Hetland and Abigail N. Martin emphasize, institutional reforms must be accompanied by popular struggle and direct action. This is exactly what happened in the municipality of Torres in Venezuela, where hundreds of citizens occupied City Hall to demand implementation of participatory budgeting. For a radical democratic change to happen, there must be large popular movements demanding and struggling for this change. But unless ideas of direct and participatory democracy are known and familiar to most people, such movements will not emerge. So a first step, then, is to spread these ideas and make a strong argument for how direct and participatory democracy can be feasible today. In Indian society it is well known that people will not call for what they don't know.

Perhaps the time has come to create an international network from the bottom-up of social movements and activists campaigning for and struggling for direct and participatory democracy. While there already exist some networks and initiatives, most of these are sponsored by or supported by agencies like the World Bank and by governments and other elite institutions. What is lacking is a more radical agenda, an international grassroots-based network promoting and struggling for participatory democracy as an alternative and ultimately a replacement of the existing system. Through such a network, social movements, activists and ordinary citizens across the world could exchange ideas and experiences, learn from each other, and develop common campaigns and struggles.

The huge task of reinventing and struggling for direct and participatory democracy in the age of austerity, centralized corporate power and technocratic rule will not be easy. But in the face of increasing ecological, social, political and economic crises, creating *real* democracy could be our only hope.

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