



DEMOCRACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: AN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The Democracy has been celebrated as one of the best form of government globally. However, still in many countries this best form of government is not followed; and the struggle of the people is going on, in support of it. In case of our country (India), which is called as the largest democracy in the world, the story of nearly 70 years of our independence is a mixed bag. Of course, when we got independence there are many political pundits who predicted that we'll break up and cannot stay united (the reason being our diversity, in terms of languages, religion, castes etc). However, we prove them wrong and stand as a one of the good example for many countries, which are having more or less same characteristics like us. Here, it's very necessary to say that, still our democracy has to go long way. As rightly said by historian Ramachandra Guha, as a "nation-state, India is 80 per cent successful but as a democracy, perhaps only 50 per cent." Thus, this paper was divided into two sections, the first one deal briefly with the global experience of democracy, while the last part deals with Indian democracy.

KEYWORDS : Democracy; People; Government; Parliament etc

Introduction

The 15th September is very important date for the mankind. On this date, every year, we all together (globally) celebrate the 'International Democracy Day' which was started since 2008. As a student of Political Science at school level, we still remember the quote given by the Late American President Abraham Lincoln, regarding 'Democracy', i.e. 'of the people, by the people and for the people', given in the text book. It was delivered by Lincoln in the Gettysburg address on 19th November 1863. Since, then it has come to signify the definition of democracy itself. Although, the definition of the democracy cannot be uniform for many people across the globe and, they have their own definition. But, still the importance of democracy as the best form of government is undisputed, when we compare with other form of governments like (Monarchy, Dictatorship, Aristocracy, Theocracy etc).

Global Democracy: An Experience

In the 21st century, many countries from Europe and United States of America are called as the 'Advanced Democracy'. The reason being the citizens and governments, at their respective country are doing their role very effectively, which helpful in the governance of the society. But, it does not mean that the above countries are fully developed, in fact, democracy is an ever evolving concept and no country can say that, we are totally or fully democratic country. With the changing time or situation, the democracy also changes, take for instance the evolution of 'Digital Governance'. How, the evolving new technology can affect the concept of democracy in present and coming times. Also, democracy does not mean just giving right to vote to the citizens, as it happen in many countries of the world. It is more than that, (for example) Part III of the Indian Constitution deals with the Fundamental Rights of the people, from article 14 to 32, (Right to Equality; Right to Freedom; Right against Exploitation; Right to Freedom of Religion; Cultural and Educational rights; and Right to Constitutional Remedies). The above mentioned rights prevent the establishment of an autocratic rule in the country.

In present time, many countries in Africa; Middle East; and Latin America are having an undemocratic government; and it is a big challenge for the world community, especially the so called the defender of democracy, in establishing a democratic government in those places. Even the recent year's instances like 'Arab Spring' in early 2011 in Middle East and 'Umbrella Movement' in Hong Kong (from September to December 2014), shows that the movement for democracy is spreading its wing across the globe, but, still much needs to be done. Today, according to Freedom House report on 'Freedom in the World 2016'; the countries across the globe are divided into three groups, firstly, out of 195 countries, 86 countries are

designated as 'Free' which is nearly 2.9 billion people or (40%) of the global total population, for example, India, Denmark, U.S.A. etc comes under this category. Secondly, 59 countries out of 195 are designated as 'Partly Free', which is 1.8 billion people or (24%) of global total population, for example, Mexico, Turkey, Pakistan etc. Lastly, 50 countries like Russia, China, Uzbekistan etc are designated as 'Not Free', which is 2.6 billion people or (36%) of the global total population. Here, the countries are judged on the basis of political rights and civil liberties given to their citizens.

Indian Democracy: An Experience

Indian democracy is famously called the largest democracy in the world, and the reason being well known to all, because of our population (1.3 billion). Just to give an idea, how big we are, in 2014 General Election (Lok Sabha) nearly 55 crore people voted or participated in the election process. This number is more than, if we compare the total population of some countries in the world. But, really this (number) is proud to us, may be in some extent the answer is 'yes'. Especially, when India got independence, there are many scholars across the world, talking about disintegration of India into different parts; the reasons being, our diversity in terms of languages, cultures, religions, castes, tribes etc. However, we have a nation stood united and shown to the world that multi-cultural societies can also exist together in a democracy. This is our strength of 'Unity in Diversity' and we enter into the 70th year of independence. But, there also existing many challenges or obstacles in the way of our democracy. Some of them are:

a) Lack of progress for Women's Representation

The population of women in India consist of nearly (50%) of our total population. But, when it comes to representation in the Parliament, it was very low. According to Inter Parliamentary Union (an international organization of Parliaments), as of 1st August 2016, out of 193 countries, India Stands at the 143rd position with 65/543 Lok Sabha seats) women parliamentarian, which is (12.1%) of the lower house. Even, countries like Nepal (29.6%); Afghanistan (27.7%); Pakistan (20.6%); Bangladesh (20%) and Somalia (13.8%) has better record than India. The global average for women in Parliaments stood at (22.8%). Thus, the need for increase in the participation of women in the Indian Parliament is very much essential. In this regard, women's reservation in the Parliament should be considered seriously by our various political parties. As our neighbour countries like Nepal; Afghanistan and Pakistan have done in their respective Parliaments with (29%); (28%) and (20%) reservation respectively. The passing of women's reservation bill by our Parliament, will lead to drastic change in the structure of Indian politics and, achieving the dream of true gender equality in our society.

b) Criminalization of Politics

The growing criminalization of politics in our country is becoming very serious issue. According to Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), the 2014 Lok Sabha Election saw the highest number of MPs with criminal charges elected. Their number was 186(34%) of the 541 Lok Sabha seats. This number has increased from (24%) in 2004 to (30%) in 2011 Lok Sabha election. But, the most disturbing about these criminal charges are for serious crimes related to murder, attempt to murder, kidnapping, communal disharmony etc. The total number of MPs charged with serious crime increased from (11%) to (15%) and (21%) in 2004; 2009 and 2011 Lok Sabha elections respectively.

c) Duties or Obligations of the Citizens

The framers of our Constitution did not include Fundamental Duties of the Citizens initially; rather, they included the duties of the State, in the form of Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) in our Constitution. Although, then Congress government in the year 1976, through 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act added Part IVA under which (Article 51A) deals with the ten Fundamental Duties of the citizens, and one more was added in 2002. As a citizen of this country, this is the right time to question ourselves, do we discharge seriously our Fundamental Duties or not. Of course, Fundamental Rights are very much important, but we never forgot that Fundamental Duties are equally important. But unfortunately, in our country, we citizens intentionally or unintentionally don't care about our duties; rather we talk only about rights. Both, Fundamental Rights and Duties are inseparable from each other. This is more important especially, when more than (60%) of our population is under 35 years of age. The youth of this country should understand the importance of Fundamental Duties.

Conclusion

To conclude, no doubt democracy is the best form of government available to the people. Globally, democracy is evolving and the theme for this year International Democracy Day has been '*Democracy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*'. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals(SDGs) and 169 targets, by the year 2030 cannot be achieved, without the strong and equal participation of not only Parliaments across the country, but more importantly, people, civil society etc. The SDGs goals consist of: from end extreme poverty; fight inequality and injustice, to tackling climate change etc. For a democracy to function, it is essential that a factors like political accountability towards the people; strengthening link between Parliament and Citizens; Public Participation; Strengthening the voices of the citizens (including marginalized, deprived and disadvantaged sections) of the society; and more importantly engaging youth in politics, should be take into consideration in any country(including India).

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