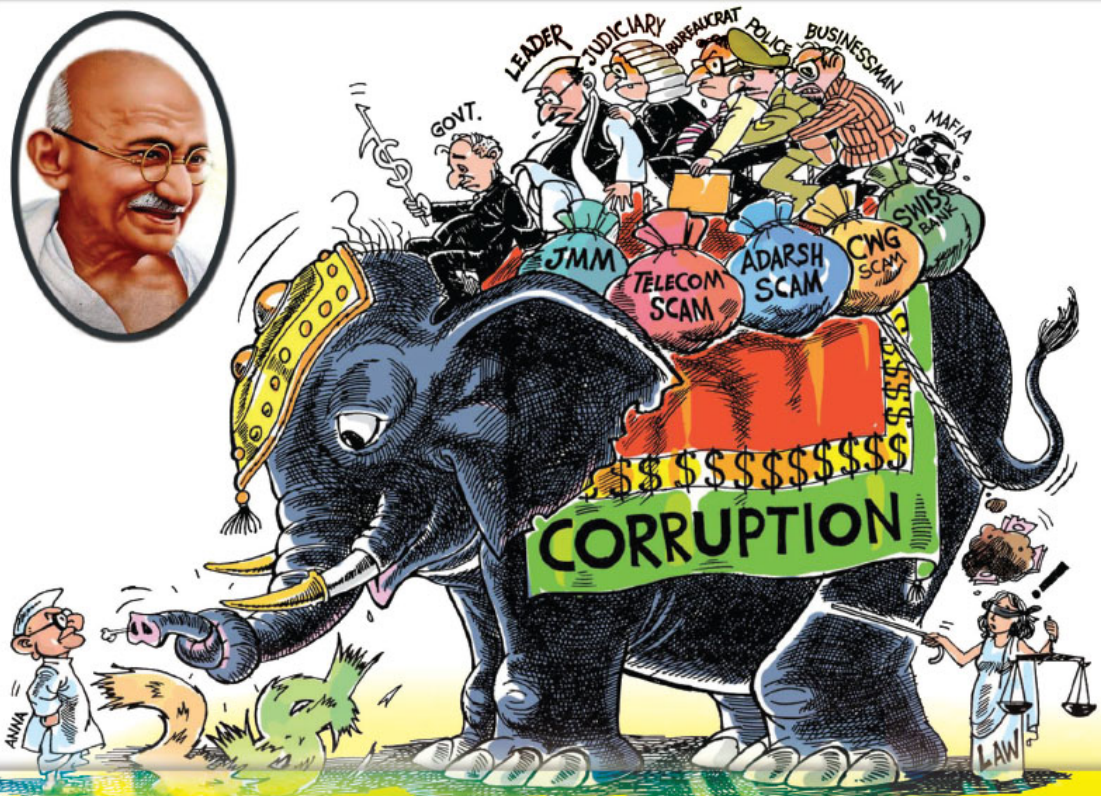
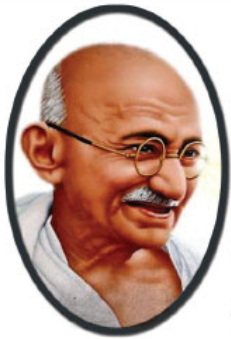


Major Threats to Indian Democracy and A Gandhian Remedy



Dr. Kiran Pramod Tiwary

Copyright © 2019, Dr. Kiran Pramod Tiwary
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine, newspaper or broadcast.

Published in India by Prowess Publishing,
YRK Towers, Thadikara Swamy Koil St, Alandur, Chennai,
Tamil Nadu 600016

ISBN: 978-93-89097-62-7

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
Chapter 1 Indian Democracy: An Introduction	1
Chapter 2 Emergence of Regional Parties	17
Chapter 3 Coalition Politics in India	33
Chapter 4 Corruption in Politics	42
Chapter 5 Criminalisation of Politics	55
Chapter 6 Caste in Politics	66
Chapter 7 Communalism in Politics	78
Chapter 8 Ambiguities in Panchayati Raj System	86
Chapter 9 Gandhian Principles as Remedy	98

Chapter 1

INDIAN DEMOCRACY: AN INTRODUCTION

INDIA has adopted democracy as the system to build up her resources and to eradicate poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and communalism, safeguarding the freedom of the individual, which is the basis of human development. For this, provisions are made in the Constitution for liberty, equality, freedom of the press, independent and impartial judicial system, free and fair electoral system, parliamentary institutions, and secularism in the form of Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles. But, for more than six decades after independence, there is no significant progress to completely eradicate poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and communalism. Instead, there is growing poverty, rising illiteracy, inequality, injustice and, in consequence, a considerable spurt in violence. The phenomenon of terrorism and naxalite violence is a consequence of the erosion of basic institutions, the undermining of the socio-psychological depths of the political process and lack of economic development in the rural areas.

In India, the franchise is effectively exercised at regular periodic elections at all levels of governance from the grassroots three-tier Panchayati Raj and Nagarpalikas to the State Assemblies and the Parliament.

Although, India is the world's most complex and comprehensively pluralistic society, home to a vast variety of castes, tribes, communities, religions, languages, customs and living styles. It is the world's largest parliamentary democracy and is one of the postcolonial countries that could be regarded as having a stable democratic in terms of size, population, and resources. It is also the world's most participatory political system based on the universal adult regime.

The term "democracy" means different things to different people. Indeed, there is a wide range of perspectives as to the meaning and content of democracy as

well as to the conditions of its realization; all of which vary depending on the advocates' philosophical, ideological, political, cultural, social, and economic perspectives. This range of perceptions goes from the highly conceptual as expressed by the great thinkers of western civilization and by other great non-western political philosophers, to the practical means of the application as expressed by contemporary experts. However, the antithesis of democracy as recognized by almost all post-1900's political thinkers, are the ideologies of fascism, communism, and totalitarianism.

The factors taken into account by contemporary commentators and proponents of different perspectives on democracy are not always clear or easily identifiable; and when they are, it is not always apparent that the various arguments, they proposed, are followed consistently or logically (Bassiouni, 1998). This is evident in the literature on contemporary political thought, but even more so in the public debate over democracy. One of the sources of this intellectual and political confusion is the fact that the term democracy is often used interchangeably and without distinction with respect to the following three different concepts for which the term is employed (Bassiouni, 1998):

1. Democracy as a process, with all that which it comports of mechanisms, procedures and formalities—from political organization to elections.
2. Democracy as a state or condition, (*unetat*, the French equivalent, which more aptly conveys this meaning than its English counterpart), with all which this condition implies for given civil society and its governance, including the processes of democracy and maybe also democratic outcomes.
3. Democracy as an outcome is putting into effect policies and practices which are generally agreed upon by the governed. Such an outcome may or may not be the result of a condition or state, and it may or may not be the product of democratic processes.

These three concepts are neither mutually self-excluding nor contradictory; on the contrary, they are on the same continuum. But it is important to distinguish between them because in a sense they represent three levels or stages of democracy (Bassiouni, 1998). Whatever meaning and content are given to the term democracy, what essentially distinguishes it in essence from other systems of government is the right of popular participation in governance, and the legitimacy and legitimation of government and governance.

Democracy in any of its meanings requires the existence and free exercise of certain basic individual and group rights without which no democracy,

however, perceived, can exist. It is identified by the following basic principles, and by a set of institutions and practices through which these principles are realized:

- ✓ **Liberty or Freedom**
- ✓ **Equality**
- ✓ **Fraternity and Duty**
- ✓ **Justice**
- ✓ **Dignity**
- ✓ **Participation and Responsibility**

Liberty or Freedom: Another basic belief of democracy is liberty or freedom. Liberty is a moral and political principle. It identifies the condition in which, human beings are able to govern themselves, to behave according to their own free will and take responsibility for their actions. There are different conceptions of liberty, which articulate the relationship of individuals to society in different ways. According to Aristotle, liberty is the characteristic of democracy.¹ This, then, is one note of liberty which all democrats affirm to be the principle of their state. Another is that a man should live as he likes. This, they say, is the privilege of a freeman, since, on the other hand, not to live as a man likes is the mark of a slave. This is the second characteristic of democracy, whence has arisen the claim of men to be ruled by none, if possible, or, if this is impossible, to rule and be ruled in turns; and so it contributes to the freedom based upon equality.

Liberty is defined as freedom from control. In a democratic state, the citizens believe that all persons should have maximum freedom for the development of their personality according to their abilities and desires.² Freedom does not mean the removal or absence of restraints. It is limited both by the obligations of one citizen to another and by the capacities of the individual to use his freedom for self-development and the common good. Within the limits imposed by the general welfare, his basic rights must be protected by law and commonly accepted custom. The freedom exists and thrives in a democratic state and the citizens of a democratic state are thinking human beings fully conscious of their rights and duties. A citizen of a democratic country makes an equal contribution towards the discovery of the best techniques of democratic government.

¹Aristotle, *Politics*. Lib. VI, Cap. ii. 350 BC.

²*ibid.*

In India, liberty or freedom has been preserved and ensured to our citizens through a set of Fundamental Rights. It was well understood by the fathers of our Constitution that the ideal of democracy was unattainable without the presence of certain minimal rights which are essential for a free and civilized existence. Therefore, the Preamble mentions these essential individual rights such as freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship which are assured to every member of the community against all the authorities of States by Part-III of the Constitution (Mohapatra, 2011).

Equality: In a democratic society, equality means equality of opportunity and equality before the law.³ Equality involves first of all the absence of legal discrimination against any one—individual, group, class or race. Secondly, equality claims to provide adequate opportunities for all, recognizing the fact that there can be no difference inherent in nature between claims of people to happiness and especially, that no one person or group may be sacrificed to another. While referring to the authors of the American Declaration of Independence, Abraham Lincoln said “They did not intend to declare all men equal in all respects. They did not mean to say all were equal in color, size, intellect, moral development or social capacity. They defined with tolerable distinctness in what respects they did consider all men created equal—equal with ‘certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’ This they said and this they meant.”⁴ It means the inequalities created by nature—beauty, ugliness, good health and bad health—cannot be removed, but only their discriminatory effects can be minimized. Equality has various dimensions: legal, political, social and economic.

Legal Equality: It means equality before the law and equal protection of the law, i.e., every citizen is subject to the ordinary law of the land and has to stand trial in the same law courts irrespective of his status or position in the society. In a democracy, the citizens live not under the rule of a few men, but under the rule of laws made by the people, binding on all equally.⁵

Rule of Law means there is supremacy of law which may be characterized as an arbitrary power, and every action of government must be authorized by law. It is the recognition of the inherent rights of the people that ensures liberty and security to all individuals alike and is, therefore, antithetic to arbitrariness, and discrimination of any kind.

Democracy survives where Rule of Law prevails. No person or small group or persons can make the laws or act with irresponsible disregard for the law.

³ibid., p. 3.

⁴Kothari, Rajni, *State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1988), p. 199.

⁵ibid., p. 3.

In a democracy, the people make laws for the protection of individuals in a mutual society of brothers. Accordingly, there should be the supremacy of law and should neither be arbitrary nor should it guarantee privilege or take account of privilege, rich and poor, high and low must be treated equally before the law.

Political Equality: It means that all citizens have the same political rights and equal voice in government, and an equal access to all offices of authority, provided one possesses the necessary qualifications and requirements. This implies democracy and adult suffrage.

Social Equality: Social equality means that all citizens are equally tangible units of society and no one is entitled to special privileges. All have equal opportunities to stand up and develop their personality. It implies no distinction in the social status of the people, because of differences in race, color, sex, class or caste, i.e., there exists no unnecessary social restraint which retards the growth of an individual and realization of his ambition of a good and happy life.

Economic Equality: Economic equality is the most important amongst all the other equalities in a society. It involves sufficiency for all to satisfy their primary or basic needs.

Fraternity and Duty: In fact, democracy involves fellowship, i.e., the feeling of fraternity or consciousness of kind. Fellow feeling aims at the realization of the common-end or the welfare of humanity. Democracy does not recognize class distinctions based on religion, cast, birth, or wealth. It is only in a society of equals that harmony can be secured. By equality, we mean, equality of opportunity. This kind of equality ensures social justice, which is the very life-breath of democracy. In India, social justice is an imperative necessity for democratic survival and secularism and socialism (of the Indian constitutional variety) are the chosen strategies for social solidarity and national integration.

A duty is an obligation and is something we owe to others as social beings. Duty to one's best self, to one's family, to one's village, to one's country, and to the community of nations is one of the democratic concepts. In a democracy, the citizen has a sense of moral obligation to cooperate with each other to achieve social and economic justice. Jawaharlal Nehru had said that the law of life should be competition or acquisitiveness but cooperation, the good of each contributing to the good of all. In such a society the emphasis would, certainly, be on duties, not on the rights, as the rights would follow the performance of the duties.⁶

⁶Reid, T. John. Democracy in American Civilisation Series No. 4, op. cit., p. 6.

Justice: Justice is one of the main goals of democratic constitutions, along with the other basic principles of the constitution, viz., liberty, equality, fraternity, human dignity, etc.

Since ancient times, philosophers have said that justice is achieved when everyone receives what is due to her or him. Justice is certainly achieved when persons with equal qualifications receive equal treatment from the government. For example, a government establishes justice when it equally guarantees the human rights of each person within its authority. As each person is equal in her or his membership in the human species, each one possesses the same immutable human rights, which the government is bound to protect equally.

Procedural Justice: It is pursued through *due process of law* to resolve conflicts between individuals or between individuals and their government. The government administers fair and impartial procedures equally to everyone under its authority in order to settle disputes among them or to prosecute persons charged with crimes against the state.

When procedural due process prevails, conflicts are settled in an orderly and fair manner in a court of law, according to the rule of law, and not by the arbitrary actions of people in power.

Distributive Justice: It is a type of justice pursued in every constitutional democracy, pertains to the government's enactment of laws to distribute benefits to the people under its authority. It certainly is achieved when equals receive the same allocation of benefits. The public programs to provide social security or basic benefits such as medical care, housing, food, and other necessities for disadvantaged persons or needy persons are examples of distributive justice in a constitutional democracy. Countries that provide extensive social and economic benefits through the redistribution of resources are known as social democracies or welfare states.

The fathers of our Constitution knew that political freedom would not automatically solve the socio-economic problems which have been deep-rooted. Therefore, they stressed that the positive constructive aspect of political freedom has to be instrumental in the creation of a new social order, based on the doctrine of socio-economic justice. The message of socio-economic justice mentioned in the preamble to our Constitution has been translated into several articles enshrined in part-III and part-IV of the Constitution. Our constitution abolishes untouchability; prohibits exploitation of the women, children and the weak and advocates for reservation to raise the standard of the people oppressed over ages. Whenever our government undertakes any developmental project it always adds a human face to it. Therefore, this ideal of a just and egalitarian society remains as one of the foremost objectives (Mohapatra, 2011).

Dignity: One of the most important basic principles of democracy is a full recognition of the dignity and worth of the individual. In a democracy, each person is important as an individual, his well-being is vital in itself.⁷ Human life, according to democratic principles is a precious far more significant than the impersonal State. Besides, in a true democracy, money, machines, and systems are important only as they contribute to man's welfare. In addition, all people have equal opportunity to achieve their goals as they came to envisage them, and to provide positive means for this purpose. A genuine democracy is an active, growing, progressive force responsive to the will of the people and inspired by the ideals of mutual service and public welfare.

Participation and Responsibility: Democracy can only function when the men and women who live in it are conscious of their responsibilities. In the purely political sphere, democracy can exist only if all citizens contribute to the healthy variety necessary for democratic growth.⁸ Democracy thrives on varied and articulate opinion. Aside from the essential act of voting freely and thoughtfully, the citizen has the responsibility of participating actively in his democracy in a variety of ways. He can, for example, take part in forums on public policy, belong to neighbourhood political club, write letters to his representatives in Parliament or Legislature, act as a member of local political bodies, or protest to the legislature through organized "pressure groups".

"Participation in a democracy can be defined as a process of arriving at a general consensus by a critical exchange of views in which the individual joins in active fellowship with others on the basis of his own choice and conviction and with the end of furthering a good life for him as well as for others."⁹

From the democratic experience in many parts of the world, we know that the basic concepts of democracy and their practices have brought the greatest good to the greatest number and can sustain and nourish the highest aspirations of mankind.

Democracy is a complex of many components. It is distinguishable, of course, by its governmental institutions such as

- ✓ **Universal Adult Suffrage**
- ✓ **Election**
- ✓ **Representative Government**
- ✓ **The Electoral Assembly**
- ✓ **Public Opinion**

⁷Reid, T. John, Democracy in American Civilisation Series No. 4, op. cit., p. 6.

⁸ibid.

⁹Kothari, Rajni, op. cit., p. 20.

Universal Adult Suffrage: The word suffrage is of Latin origin and derived from 'suffragium' which means 'vote'. The universality of adult suffrage is the world of freedom to the franchise that is 'franchising' or to free a person on the basis of equality woven in human equality. As a principle, it ensures every adult member of the community, without any qualification, an entitlement to vote in a direct election to choose the representatives in the formation of the Government. But in actual practice, suffrage is always restricted as most states exclude non-citizens, adults below a certain age, lunatics, some kinds of convicts, bankrupts, idiots and such others who cannot satisfy the conditions prescribed by the electoral rules.

The creed of 'one person, one vote', the foundation of democratic government, had to face many hurdles in the long journey of suffrage history. The idea of universal adult suffrage was accepted despite the warning of H.L. Wayland that universal suffrage could not be justified without universal education. John Stuart Mill also vehemently opposed the introduction of the system of universal suffrage but strongly advocated its extension to women. Men, as well as women, do not need political rights in order that they may govern, but in order that they may not be misgoverned. The majority of the male sex are, and will be all their lives, nothing else than labourers in corn fields or manufacturers, but this does not render the suffrage less desirable for them, nor their claim to it less irresistible, when not likely to make a misuse of it. Nobody pretends to think that women would vote as more dependents at the bidding of their male relations. For women, limited right to the franchise was there in England in 1918, finally leading to full-scale enactment of Equal Franchise Act in 1928. In the United States, the fate was no different and women had to wait till 1920 when the Nineteenth amendment granted the right to vote to women of over 30 years of age only. New Zealand has the creditable distinction to be the first country to recognize the right to franchise to her womenfolk as far back in 1839. Indian Constitution recognized equal right to men and women alike from day one. On the other hand, an adult below the age of 21 who was not an electoral adult became eligible on lowering the age to 18 years, under section 2 of the Constitution (Sixty-First Amendment Act 1988).

The significance of universal adult suffrage has been highlighted by Edward Shils who wrote: "The granting of universal suffrage without property or literacy qualification is perhaps the greatest single factor leading to the formation of a political society. The mere existence of the suffrage might in the course of the short time disintegrate the nascent political society, if it is not accompanied by other changes as well. Nonetheless, the drawing of the whole adult population periodically into contact with the symbols of the centre of national political life must in the course of time have immeasurable consequences for stirring people

up giving them a sense of their own potential significance and for attaching their sentiments to symbols which comprehend the entire nation”.¹⁰

According to Dorothy Pickles, democracy, to be meaningful, “must first be able to elicit as accurately as possible the opinions of as many people as possible of who should be their representatives. This means, at a minimum, universal suffrage, political parties and the organization of free voting in the uncorrupt election at frequent intervals. Second, it must provide the way of ensuring that those chosen by the people do what in fact do what the electorate wants them to do or that they can be replaced even between elections.”¹¹ Elections then, become the bedrock of the representative democracy.

Election: The word ‘Election’ is of Latin origin and derived from the root ‘eligere’. Election literary means “the public choice of a person for office.”¹² An election in political line is the blood and breathe of democracy. Democracy survives and thrives on the election. Elections are the language through which people voice their final verdict. The majesty of elections is that it gives the electorate an opportunity to sit in judgment upon the facts and fancies of the aspiring candidates or parties. The election is also viewed as a process through which political will is built up. Election reflects the numeracy of ideological census in its process of political exercise leading to the democracy. It is the process through which, people of a country choose the government, clothe it with legitimacy and make it representative.

Free and fair elections are essential in assuring the consent of the governed, which is the bedrock of democratic politics. Elections serve as the principal mechanism for translating that consent into governmental authority. Democratic elections are not merely symbolic. They are competitive, periodic, inclusive, definitive elections in which the chief decision-makers in a government are selected by citizens who enjoy broad freedom to criticize the government, to publish their criticism, and to present alternatives. Opposition parties and candidates must enjoy the freedom of speech, assembly, and movement necessary to voice their criticisms of the government openly and to bring alternative policies.

The party in power may enjoy the advantages of incumbency, but the rules and conduct of the election contest must be fair. On the other hand, freedom of assembly for opposition parties does not imply mob rule or violence.

¹⁰Shils. Edward, “Political Development in the New States” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (New York, April 1960), Vol. 11, No.3, p. 267.

¹¹Pickles, Dorothy, *Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), p. 13.

¹²Macdonald, A.M. and Kirskpatrick, E.M. (eds.), *Chambers Everyday Dictionary* (London: W & R Chambers Ltd. 1987), p. 226.

In a democracy, it is the people who make and unmake the government, In other words, a democratic government always remains responsible to its people. The practice of liberal democracy is based on the theory of representation with two underlying principles of popular sovereignty and majority rule.

Representative Government: Foundation of a modern system of representation thus, is based on two basic concepts: First, since sovereignty rests with the people, the government is responsible to the people. Second, wish or claim of a majority is more important than that of a minority. Carl J. Friedrich says, “The election of representatives therefore always involves the paring down of some claims; just can only be achieved if these claims are equitably adjusted. Presumably, the majority’s claims are weightier than those of any minority. Representation is a broad thing: representatives are elected so that many may participate indirectly in the essential tasks. The majority participates through acting, the minority through discussion and criticism. If the majority fails to be represented adequately, because its representatives are unable to act, the injustice is just as great, or greater, than if the minority fails to be represented adequately, because its representatives cannot talk as much as they would like to.”¹³ John Stuart Mill defined a representative form of government as one in which “the whole people or some numerous portion of them exercise periodically elected by those the ultimate controlling power which in every constitution, must reside somewhere.”¹⁴

However, the pre-eminence of the trilogy of party affiliation, issue orientation and candidate personification are the determinants of electoral choice. Political parties are considered to be essential for democratic dispensation and formation of a government. Political actors dealing with issues organize public opinion. Unorganized interaction of many minds when converted into a social product, public opinion is formed. Public opinion then forms the basis of the concept of government by discussion.

The Electoral Assembly: The electoral assembly is the product of the freedom of choice exercised by the people through the process of the election and it reflects the collective wisdom of the electorate, voting is an incidence of an election. In a multi-party democratic polity, a difference of opinion is the rule and voting becomes inevitable. Voting is a valuable right. It can also be viewed as a social trust. Elections open up the golden channel of communication between rulers and the ruled. After all, it is the election which legitimizes the right of the rulers to govern. The nature of representatives is considered to be that of a delegate who represents a geographical collection

¹³Friedrich, Carl. *Jaochism*, op. cit., p. 283.

¹⁴Mill, J. S., op. cit., p. 228.

of opinions while retaining his own. The question of making a right choice of representative assumes supreme importance in this context. A right choice of representative is possible only under conditions of the free and fair atmosphere. If an election is held in a ritualistic way without being free and fair, it loses its meaning, purpose and moral force. Electorate corruption not only distorts the people's choice in terms of the representatives but also the government built on the support of these representatives. Periodic elections based on open and fair competition make the electorate the masters of their choice in the selection of representatives giving birth of an assembly. Every such assembly is a new one bearing the mark of installation, renewal of rejection of faith in the government in power. Under the parliamentary system of government, a wider view of the national scale of interest is taken by the representatives although they are elected from a territorial constituency. According to Edmund Burke, "Parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole—where not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole." (Burke, 1974). Parliament as an elected legislative body is to 'choose a ruler for the occasion' and the person commanding the majority support emerges as the Prime Minister who is the centre of birth, life, and death of Ministry.

The chief functions of Parliament are elective, expressive and legislative. House of Parliament is constructed on the principle of 'unite and rule'. The opposition, therefore, has to work in national interest while the government in power has to act in cooperation with the rest. The Parliament is constituted to maintain a responsible government and not to pose as a threat to its survival.

Public Opinion: It is a truism that democracy means government by public opinion. It represents at once a working measure of common agreement and a driving force in working the governmental machinery. It is an active and propelling factor in a democratic state. The people at regular intervals are called upon to elect the representatives and the electors express their opinion in favor or against certain programmes and policies put before them by different political parties. If the majority vote goes in favor of a party it gives a mandate to that particular party or coalition of parties, who had agreed on some basic principles prior to the election, to form a government. The mandate is withdrawn at the next election if the confidence reposed in them had been betrayed. In fact, no party, whether in power or opposition, can afford to forget that tomorrow is the day of an election. The ultimate appeal rests with the people, and the party in office must remember those who entrusted them with power. Responsibility and responsiveness to the people keep the government alert and removes possibilities of arbitrary exercise of authority.

Democracy generates freedom and guarantees expressions of views to influence public policy. By giving citizens an opportunity to have their say, democracy binds them with a sort of vital tissue to the government. There are thus, not only outgoing currents of commands and ordinances issued from the central seat of authority, but also incoming currents in the form of suggestions, desires, and grievances of people. Democracy is the best qualified constantly to adjust the supply of control to social need and favors a wholesale social equilibrium. Public opinion enables the democratization of political institutions and keeps them true to the constructive role and offset the shortcomings of expertise. Democracy lives and thrives on public opinion, provided it is honest, forceful and vigilant.

Rajni Kothari rightly observes “a democratic system must give rise to an open and flexible society where individual freedom has the maximum scope to flourish. It must impart unity and stability to society, thus giving rise to conditions, which allow unfettered scope for individual creativity. Creativity is the ideal and a democratic system is the means to achieve the ideal.”¹⁵

Evolution of Democratic Process in India

The concept of democracy is not new in India, as a substance of self-government lies imbedded in our past history. This system probably came into being because the village and the people were too distant from the centres of political power. Today this ancient institution has been transformed into a new organ of self-government at a district and block level as a link between the government's programme and the people. Although the early Kings were autocratic, their power was in practice subject to definite checks, among which was the force of public opinion.

Ancient India is claimed to be the repository of the highest form of democracy. We find the people (vishah) participating in urban councils with the power to instruct and direct the king according to their will. The multitude of ethnicities and people provided for the autonomy and self-determination of the villages, city-states, republics, and constitutional kingdoms through the observance of Dharma. The villages ruled by their elected representatives and were, therefore, autonomous and self-governing administrative units having the power to manage their educational, economic social, administrative and other requirements. Their own assemblies and committees also governed townships. Prior to Greek and Athenian democracy, there were a number of republics established by people dissenting against the monarchy in ancient

¹⁵Kothari, Rajni, *State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance*, op. cit., p. 199.

India functioning in line with the principle of people's participation that was. These republics were an expression of the idea of government through an assembly representing the people. Despite inconsistencies and attacks republics continued to survive till the 4th Century A.D.

The earliest sources of information about ancient Indian political tradition, Vedas, provide enormous information about the theory and practice of government in that period. Ancient Shastric literature, scriptures such as Rigveda, Aitaria Brahman, Panini's Ashtadhyayi, Kautilya's Arthashastra, Sukracharya's Nitisara, the Mahabharata, inscriptions on Ashoka's Pillars, writings of Buddhist and Jain scholars and the Manusmriti are replete with evidence of deliberately elected representative bodies like sabhas and Samitis in the form of Janapadas (regional bodies), Paurasabhas (City Councils) and Gramsabhas (Village assemblies).

Nitisara, the science of polity by Shukracharya of the tenth century gives the idea of Indian Polity. It deals with the organization of the Central government as well as the town and the village life of the King's Council of State and various departments of government. The village panchayat or elected council had large powers, both executive and judicial and its members were treated with the greatest respect by the King's officers. Over a number of these village councils, there was a larger panchayat or council to supervise and interfere if necessary. "Radha Kumud Mookerjee, writing about grassroots democracy in his Glimpses of Ancient India mentioned the system of functioning of decision of majority as inviolable, not to be overridden because where many meet in an assembly and speak there with one voice, that voice or vote of the majority is not to be violated by others (Saha, 2000)."

Similarly, some old inscriptions tell us how the members of the village councils were elected, their qualifications and disqualifications. Various committees were, elected annually, and women could serve in them. The system of voting was by tickets (salaka) which were the slips of wood representing different opinions. Complicated matters and serious issues were often referred to special committee elected from among the members of the assembly (Altekar, 1972). In case of misbehaviour, a member could be removed. A member could be disqualified if he failed to render accounts of public funds. Near relatives of members were not to be appointed to public offices to prevent nepotism.

The village councils were very jealous of their liberties and no soldier could enter the village unless he had a royal permit. If the people complained of an official, the king used to take the side, not of his offices, but of his subjects. If many complained, then the official was to be dismissed. The King was to act in accordance with the opinion of the majority of the people. Nitisara says that in making official appointments work, character and merit were to be regarded

as neither caste nor family and neither through colour nor through ancestors. There was a widespread system of self-government in towns and villages and the central government seldom interfered. Customary law was strong and the political or military power seldom interfered with rights based on customs.¹⁶ These democratic institutions started to decline with the passage of time and the republican states disappeared.

The idea of representative institutions emerged during the British rule in India. The Indian Councils Act, 1892, introduced the system of indirect representation. The non-official members of the Indian Legislative Council were to be nominated by the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and the Provincial Legislative Councils were to be nominated by certain local bodies such as universities, district boards, and municipalities. Dadabhai Naoroji pressed on the idea of wider representation. The Indian Councils Act, 1909 commonly known as the Morely-Minto Reforms formed the basis of direct representation for the first time.

It must be noted here that democracy is not the same in all countries. Democracy as a form of government is different in different countries depending upon the situations of the respective country. Democracy is a process, not a static situation. Accordingly, democracy means the participation of all the people in a process of how to run the government.

Among the many kinds of governments, democracy is considered as the best as it enunciates a system in which decisions are made with the participation of the people and the interests of the people are protected by their own involvement. The importance of democracy lies in the fact that in the democratic polity, political power is exercised with the support of the people and the rulers seek justification of their action on the basis of the willing acceptance of the ruled. Thus, democracy presupposes less friction between the rulers and ruled.

In a democracy, dissents are recognized as an accepted fact and opposite opinions are allowed to exist and flourish simultaneously. It tries to assimilate the diverse points of view and accommodates the demands of different groups by bringing a rapprochement between the majority and minorities. It lessens the negative impacts of dissent and gives an opportunity to the masses to change their representatives in due time.

India has adopted democracy as the system to build up her resources and to eradicate poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and communalism, safeguarding the freedom of the individual, which is the basis of human development. For

¹⁶Nehru, Jawaharlal, *The Discovery of India*, op. cit., pp. 248–249.

You've Just Finished your Free Sample

Enjoyed the preview?

Buy: <https://store.prowesspub.com>