



India's Democracy shifted into 'Electoral Dictatorship': A Study of Critical Analysis

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Abstract:

This study mainly discusses all the major challenges that India faces in establishing the status of the world's strongest-largest democracy in the current century. Equality and freedom are essential elements of any democracy. The Constitution of India recognizes and protects the right to personal liberty as the cornerstone of a democratic edifice. That carefully cherished Indian democratic freedom has waned today. At the same time, in very recently the electoral majority has become extremely dominant factor in Indian democracy. It is a much more exploratory study from a critical point of view. This study has been completed using descriptive analysis method with purely qualitative study. The present researcher has collected primary and secondary information through books, journals, internet, websites, reports of various think tank institutes and other relevant sources. Major findings of this study are that various studies (V-Dem Institute 2020 reports) have shown that in the last few years, the ultimate electoral majority in India's democracy has turned into an 'Electoral Autocracy'. In India, the situation has changed since the Bharatiya Janata Party, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, won two consecutive general elections in May 2019, and Hindutva has taken over society and politics with the rise of nationalists. With the continuous rise of 'Hindu Nationalism' in the country, society and politics have been taken over by Ultra Hindu nationalists. Freedom of expression has been curtailed there as well as the freedom of the media and civil society is far from over. Recently, the central government used the UAPA (Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. 2019 as a tool to harass, intimidate and imprison political opponents, as well as to silence dissident academics using the UAPA Act. In the 21st century, in the wake of the above-mentioned dramatic changes events, India has faced great challenges in shrinking freedom of expression and declining democracy.

Keywords: Democracy, Freedom, Electoral Dictatorship, Hindu Nationalism.

Introduction:

The newly independent state of India, which embraced democratic ideals in 1947, has entered its 75th years of independence as the largest democracy in the world. Now the word 'democracy' is derived from the Ancient Greek words 'kratos' (mean power, or rule) and 'demos' (the people). Where the Greeks originally used this to mean 'the poor' or 'the many' in this sense. Although the term democracy was implicated in a pejorative sense to indicate a form of 'mob rule' until the nineteenth century. Again, in some parts of the developing world the promotion of democracy is associated with Westernization. In this context later on 1993, Bernard Crick's used the phrase "democracy is perhaps the most promiscuous word in the world of public affairs." Perhaps the more helpful notion about democracy is found in the Gettysburg address

delivered of former US President Abraham Lincoln in 1863. Which he called appreciatively of virtue “Democracy is a government of the people, for the people, and by the people.” However, What we mean by democracy’s the simple notion of the word democracy is ‘rule by the people’. Democracy in the Indian state of Asian countries has followed in a completely different style from the Western democracy that grew up in a pluralistic cultural environment. According to the constitution of independent India, a democratic government has been established in this country. The system of government in India is not only democratic but also republican. Even since independence, representative democratic governance has been introduced in India. Various political and constitutional measures have been implemented for the establishment and development of democracy in India. The basic democratic elements of the Indian state system have been expressed in various sources. These sources include constitutional provisions, laws enacted by Parliament and decisions of the Election Commission etc. The constitutional provisions, such as the preamble to the Indian Constitution, the fundamental rights of Part III (article 12-35), the directive principles of state policy in Part IV (article 36-51), the structures of parliamentary federal government at the central, state and local levels, have articulated various aspects of democratic governance in independent India. Local Self Govt. has been established in India through the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution to decentralize power and establish democracy at the grassroot level. The Fourth Pillar (Supreme Court, UPSC, Comptroller and Auditor General, Election Commission) of Indian Democracy, the fourth pillar of Election Commission, has been entrusted with the important task of firmly establishing democracy through the conduct of “free and fair” elections. Every 18-year-old Indian citizen, irrespective of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth, has been given important political rights like adult suffrage on the basis of under article 326. India, like other countries in the world, has adopted liberal democratic system. These include the rule of law on the rights of citizens, the expansion of state responsibilities, the democratic organizational system of government, the democratic structure of state power, and fair elections. Where the democratic values of equality, freedom and fraternity are particularly compatible with the thinking and conscience of civilized society. Since 1950, all Indians have been responsible for the successful progress of democracy in India. But sadly, the breakdown of the world’s largest democracy in the 21st century has injured Indian democracy. Such a shocking piece of information has come up in the 2021 report of the V-Dem Institute of the University of Gothenburg in Sweden in the survey of democracy of the last 10 years. The report makes it clear that India’s democracy is flawed and that electoral autocracy (US, France, Belgium and Brazil) exists. Naturally, this is a huge challenge for returning the lost glory in Indian democracy.

Objectives of this Study:

The objectives of this study are given below

1. To elicit the challenges facing Indian democracy in the twenty-first century.
2. To exploring Indian democracy has turned into an ‘electoral autocracy’.

Methodology:

This study has been done as a qualitative study applying descriptive analysis methods. The present researcher has collected primary and secondary information through books, journals, internet, websites, reports of various think tank institutes and other relevant sources.

Biggest Challenges for Indian Democracy:

India’s 70-years history has been marked by tolerance, communal harmony, rule of law and the success of multicultural diversity. In addition, the adoption of the secular policy of the Indian state by recognizing the ‘right to religious freedom’ in Articles 25 to 28 of the Indian Constitution has set a unique precedent for various states in the world. However, the growing influence of Hindu nationalists within the affairs of this state has recently become many challenges within society and politics. The state of India is the only free

country in the region, according to the Freedom House's list of Freedom the world's 2020 report. But awarded the score is much lower than the previous year's score. It has kept it under the spotlight and the administrative part of India has classified Jammu and Kashmir as 'not free'. Since the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won an absolute majority in the lower house (Lok Sabha) in 2014, there were already some warning signs in the first term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Communal violence is on the rise in India, especially if we look at the statistics, we can see that there were 644 incidents of communal violence in 2014, 751 in 2015, 703 in 2016 and 822 in 2017. There are also recent examples of communal violence in 2020 Delhi, 2016 Dhulagarh and Baduria in West Bengal. According to NCRB data, the incidence of communal violence has risen to 41% across the country during the BJP-led government from 2014 to 2017. In many cases, there has been discrimination and communal violence against Indian religious minorities. The 2019 World Press Freedom Index highlights violence against journalists as one of the hallmarks of the recent state of press freedom in the country. Criticism of the government in particular has led to inconspicuous threats from news channels or journalists. The government has shutdown thousands of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that receive funding from abroad and wanted to have a firm grip on information technology. In many cases, the government has sued social workers, academics, especially writers, artists and journalists for censorship of freedom of speech and UAPA act. has filed a case under section alleging discrepancy with lack of patriotism. Again, the central government's national biometric scheme 'Aadhaar' has been the most criticized, and citizens face the biggest threats to personal privacy and security. Very recently, a BJP Union minister's son has been brutally killed in a drive-by shooting by farmers in Punjab's Lakhimpur Kheri in Uttar Pradesh, following government crackdowns on farmers protesting in Delhi's highways over two recent agricultural laws by the central government. India is the world leader in internet shutdown (there were 106 such suspensions in 2019). Also, the University Students and Activities has been vocal in its protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act. (CAA).

In June 2018, a report by the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights in Kashmir criticized the deployment of excessive security forces against New Delhi in this administrative part of India. However, an official spokesperson for India dismissed the report's claim. Notwithstanding, the July 2019 edition of the report found that India and Pakistan could not jointly take any concrete steps to improve the situation in Kashmir. Again, India's foreign minister has strategically avoided core issues like cross-border terrorism by creating a series of 'continuation of false narrative'.

At the same time, even before the global pandemic coronavirus outbreak, the Indian economy was in a deep recession, its growth slowed and employment was created, at the same time rising unemployment rates and consumer distrust and spending cuts, and losing confidence in the banking sector due to credit weakness. The economic downturn in India's history has been one of unprecedented shocks. Contrary to expectations, the central budget for FY 2021 failed to address the existing structural weaknesses as well as failed to generate the largest financial stimulus in response to the economic downturn. Again, many in India criticized this central budget and spoke of a directionless budget.

The Footprint of "Electoral Autocracy" in Indian Democracy:

India has come a long way since independence in 1947 and today marks the 75th year of independence. So now is probably the right time to assess the state of democracy in India. Over the past seventy years or so, the context of Indian democracy has undergone rapid changes. Even during the Cold War, India played an important role in ideological politics. But that was basically the norm in our electoral politics. Rajini Kothari, in his book in the seventies, said that the politics of India, like that of the West, was not only in the hands of a handful of people, but also of a large number of people in the country. Public participation in this Indian democracy has multiplied, especially since the 1990s. In the early 1990s, Indian politics were marked by pluralism and transformed into identity politics. Although this identity has been transformed into politics, the

track record of a democratic country like India has been acclaimed worldwide. Since the Narendra Modi-led BJP government came to power in 2014, Indian democracy has taken a new turn. Most recently, a 2021 report by the think-tank-based V-Dem Institute at University of Gothenburg in Sweden argued that India would no longer be considered an “electoral democracy” but would be classified as an “electoral Autocracy”. The agency made it clear that most of the democratic freedoms in India have decreased since the BJP-led NDA government came to power in 2014. It is further argued that India was on the verge of losing its status as a democratic country. Where the Liberal Democracy Index has moved from the top 50 out of 180 countries to the bottom 50th. India ranks 97th out of 202 countries in the world in the 2020 Liberal Democratic Index. According to statistics, during the Narendra Modi administration in the last 7 years, India’s democratic index has dropped most to the lowest level in neighboring Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan. India is one of the country’s leading the “third wave of autocracy”. With this development, about 68 percent of the world’s population is now living under authoritarian rule. This indicates an accelerated wave of authoritarianism. Where about 25 countries of the world have been included in it and classified India as a “flawed democracy” along with countries including the US, France, Belgium and Brazil. V-dem further argued that the main initiative to lead to dictatorship in general came from the ruling government. As a result, the media and civil society have begun to be targeted and the ruling party has shown complete disrespect to its opponents.

Regarding India, V-Dem said that the world’s largest democracy has now become an “electoral autocracy”. The process of authoritarianism in India has widened to create a third wave over the past few years, especially since the Narendra Modi-led BJP came to power in 2014. There, Hindu nationalism has become so influential across the country that Hindu nationalists have taken over society and politics. In the last 10 years, according to the Liberal Democracy Scale of India in 2020, the score has dropped from 0.07 in 2013 to 0.04. This indicates the ultimate degradation of the Indian democratic environment. Over the past decade, one of the largest sections of the international community has identified it as a dramatic change. In addition to the government’s restrictions on the freedom of expression of the media, the decline in the active role of civil society and organizations, there have been questions about the independence of the Election Commission. There have also been arbitrary restrictions on education and other intellectual freedoms. If we take a closer look at the extent of the decline of democracy in India, we can see that the Liberal Democratic Index score was 3.5 before the Modi administration took charge in the Indian government in 2014. By 2020 this score has come down to close to 1.5 which means censorship efforts have become very common symptoms under the current Indian government. In addition, new IT laws have made the central government more powerful, including the UAPA Act., amended in 2019. In addition to all these factors, Freedom House has taken India out of the list of ‘free’ countries by considering many more aspects. In 2020, India is ranked 142nd out of 180 countries in the Press Freedom Index. India is now ranked 111th out of 162 countries in the Cato Institute’s Human Freedom Index with a score of 6.43 Which is lower than the index’s average freedom rating of 6.93.

In 2018, freedom around the world recorded a decline for the 13th consecutive year. The most surprising thing is that the United States, the oldest democracy in the world, has also become a part of authoritarian regimes like China and Russia. So the point is that India is not alone in the gradual decline of democracy, but other major powers have followed suit. After the fall of the communist regime, many democracies in the world have fallen dramatically due to rampant corruption, awakening of anti-liberal forces, lack of good governance, existence of silent civil society and many more. Therefore, urgent steps need to be taken by the concerned states, large and small, to curb this trend. However, during the tenure of US President Donald Trump, not only the democratic ideology of the United States has been tarnished in the domestic arena, but also in the international arena. The biggest challenge for Trump’s successor, Joe Biden, is to restore the glory of the now-defunct US democracy. The United States, the world’s oldest democracy, and India, the world’s largest democracy, have high expectations of the world. But it is very unfortunate that during the rule of Narendra Modi, Post-Truth has become more important in governance and individual worship or personality

cult, where the basic problems of poverty, malnutrition and unemployment in the daily life of the citizens have been minimized. Tolerance is a very important factor in the diversity of social needs and cultural diversity in the context of India's pluralistic socio-culture. Indian democracy can never deny the ideals and principles of secularism as well as tolerance, at least our constitution says so. At the same time, the Indian economy has been hit hard by the Coronavirus outbreak long before it started, and job opportunities have fallen, unemployment has risen, confidence has fallen, spending has fallen, and the banking sector has shrunk. Again, contrary to expectations, the fiscal budget that the central government came up with in 2021 failed to address these structural weaknesses.

It is not possible to meet the expectations and needs of all the 138-crore people of the country but the economic progress of the country should focus on the survival of the people through eradication of child malnutrition and poverty and alternative employment. But if all these issues continue within the country, India will become a major obstacle to its intention to emerge as the world's largest power in the near future. However, India's continued denial of political obligations both internally and externally will increase the crisis of democracy and make it extremely difficult to deal with in the days to come.

Conclusion:

70 years have passed since the introduction of the Constitution of Independent India. So perhaps it is the time to evaluate the record of successes and failures of democratic governance in India. But a direct and concise assessment of Indian democracy, positively or negatively, is simply impossible. In this context, it can be said that the Democratic Republic of India has gone through the turbulent turmoil of the Second World War. Despite many more obstacles, the tradition of free and fair electoral system continues in India to this day. At the same time, since independence, India has never deviated from the path of development and democracy. Although the Republic of India has almost crossed the first ten of the twenty-first century, there is no doubt that the democratic tradition of the Indian state has faded considerably. But these statements do not give a complete picture of the character of democracy in the Indian political system. Notwithstanding, the controversy over the recent problems of India's liberal democratic system continues today. India's democratic state system also has some dark aspects. Relevant in this context, according to V-Dem institute, democracy in India is declining and the existence of a third wave of electoral autocracy, inactivity of civil society, interference in media freedom as well as attempts to silence prominent social activists and academics by intimidating UAPA law, communal violence, Hindu nationalism, Economy slowdown, govt. crackdown CAA bills or peasant protests (Farm Bills 2020) and student protests issues such as oppression are not a good sign for Indian democracy. Nevertheless, there is no denying that India's democratic development plan has largely presented itself as an exceptional measure, as the long six-decade track record in this regard is highly commendable. The burning issues of alternative employment in the daily life of the citizens, unemployment, corruption, lack of education, economic decline, expression of freedom, excessive censorship, child malnutrition, poverty should not be extinguished in the limelight of the Government of India's administrative success record and development planning, establishment of good governance and promotion of individual worship. However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's very recently speech on the celebration of 'Democracy Day' clearly shows that the authorities are shaken about Indian democracy. As well as we are all hopeful that the lost glory of the world's largest democracy will be restored in the days to come if the present government pays close attention to all the above issues.

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