
Research Papers



Problems of Indian Democracy

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Abstract

It is a fact that the world today is not as hopeful of democracy as it was thought in previous generations. Its attitude is one of caution, if not criticism. In the words of Woodrow Wilson, the First World War was fought to make the world safe for democracy. But the problem which has confronted it since then is how to make democracy safe for the world.

Introduction:

The years succeeding the Second World War have proved that democracy is not an open sesame to peace, prosperity and progress. Democracy has belied the hopes and aspirations of common man. The very norms of democracy have been shattered. "Democracy is being attacked today from various angles both the reactionaries and revolutionaries. It is attacked with much vehemence by believers in autocracy and dictatorship. Many of these advocate the gospel of direct action, according to which a well organized, strong willed and assertive minority should impose its will upon the helpless majority by remorseless terrorism, if necessary"¹. There has been a growing discontent and distrust with politicians and the political method evolved by democracy.

Democracy nowadays has lost its vitality and glamour. The integrity of democracy is being seriously questioned in many quarters of India

society. There is a steady pull of pessimism. Indian democracy seems to respond only inadequately to the demands on it. Instead of a good society of peace and general well being, there is lengthy or recurrent war, the threat of curtailed civic liberties and the confinement of far too many people to a shabby life that contrasts sharply with the nations resources and potential. Inevitably the quality of our political institutions and their ability to do good works become suspect. The aspects of challenges and problems of Indian democracy as discussed as under.

Election and System of Representation:

In India, elections assume two forms direct and indirect. Direct election is a process where the people personally cast their votes directly in favour of their choice candidates. The candidates in the elections have to obtain the requisite votes of the general voters with a view to represent them. The election to the state legislative assemblies and the Lok Sabha in India provide the unique example

of direct election. Direct election has a multitude of deleterious impact on the people in the sense that the voters, by and large, are ignorant and illiterate. They cannot exercise their judgement properly and are compelled to cast their vote for those who rouse their emotions. The cut throat competition in the election to win the hearts of the people creates character assassination. The contestants abuse each other and thus set bad examples for the public. It is anti democratic in nature. At the time of multi corner contest, the voters are confused to hear different claims and counterclaims which make them perplexed and biased. This system of election involves huge expenditure. The contestants are required to adopt different means to win the election. They approach the voters, keep agents and organize propaganda. For this, they have to spend lots of money which is collected from business community with an assurance to extend favour after winning the election. As a result, politics and administration become corrupt, go astray and national character is polluted.

On the other hand, indirect election is a process where the elected representatives cast their votes to elect persons for some office. The general people do not directly participate in this type of election. The president, the vice president and the members of the Rajya Sabha in India are elected through indirect election. This system of election is undemocratic in character in the sense that it deprives the voters of their right to elect the representative. It creates representatives of the second order, elects dark horses through the back door. Party influence shapes the results of this type of election.

Universal Suffrage:

Universal adult suffrage is a modern idea and is the outcome of protracted struggles in all countries. It implies a system where all adult nationals of a country excepting the excluded categories of persons are entitled to become voters and participate in elections without any distinction of caste, creed, colour, profession or sex. This system is practiced in India. The critics condemn the universal suffrage as unwise and dangerous. Macaulay predicted that universal suffrage would lead to 'vast spoilage' and it put into practice in England 'a few half naked fishermen will divide with owls and foxes ruins of the greatest of European cities'². According to Levelys, "Give the suffrage to the ignorant, and they will fall into anarchy today and to despotism tomorrow." This system leads to rule of ignorance and is opposed to

scientific progress. In our country, ignorant, illiterate and most incapable persons are being elected as our representatives which clearly indicates the fate of the nation. Franchise is not an inherent right of the citizen. It is the privilege conferred upon the citizens by the state. Since, it is a sacred responsibility, it should not be given to unintelligent persons.

Communal Representation:

This novel system was introduced in India during British regime by the Minto Morely Reform Act, 1909. According to this Act, the Muslims and Hindus were allowed to elect their representatives separately. The communal representation based on the policy of divide and rule which helped the British to perpetuate their domination. The demerits of the system outnumber the merits. May be fact that communal representation provides and safeguard to the minority communities but it has disastrous consequences for the healthy political development in a democratic country like India. The adoption of this system of representation has eroded the ideals of democracy by creating divided allegiance in the state which is prejudicial to the development of common will or sense of national unity. Further it has perpetuated the existence of class division.

Electoral Behaviour in Indian Democracy:

The study of electoral behaviour in India constitutes an important area of empirical investigation which had added a new dimension to politics through the development of an advanced discipline named political sociology.

"An empirical study of the electoral behaviour displays the astounding fact that the behaviour man is influenced by several irrational forces. The role of political parties and pressure groups in invoking religious and communal factors, influence of money or charismatic personality of a leader and a host of other irrational forces have their influence on the mind of voters. The role of these irrational forces can be discovered or discerned in case a student of empirical politics focuses his attention on how the favourable results of an election are obtained."³ This fact applies to every democratic system and India is no exception to it.

The India psychology clearly reveals the fact that the voting behaviour of Indian citizens is very much influenced by a number of variables such as religion, caste, community, language, money, policy or ideology, purpose of the polls, extent of franchise and so on. But of these

variables money has played a supreme role in winning the battle of the ballot box in recent year. Money also remained supreme in determining the electoral behaviour in India. It has been institutionalized by an amendment in the Representation of the People Act of 1974 that the amount spent by the party shall not be taken as expenditure by the candidate. This Act has polluted the sanctity of democracy and it needs urgent reform.

Political Turn Coatism:

Of late political turn coatism or political defection has assumed a formidable shape in Indian politics threatening the very survival of existing constitutional system and democracy. It has been defined by different authors in different manners. Ordinarily, it implies change of party or group, shifting of loyalty or allegiance from one party or group to another, repudiation of the label under which a legislator contents his election, crossing of floor inside the legislative chamber, founding a new party or a pressure group, leaving a party and then coming back to its fold in the fashion of marching and counter marching and the like. As expressed by S.C. Kashyap, "Unless other wise stated, the term 'defection' in this study should be understood to mean any change of political label and should include all such cases as :

- i) That of leaving a particular party after being elected as a legislator on its ticket and joining another party, or
- ii) Of resigning from the party but remaining independent thereafter, or
- iii) Of joining a particular party after being elected an independent, legislators who vote against their party in the legislator on the basic issues without actually resigning from the party should nonetheless be deemed to be defectors, irrespective of its dictionary meaning here, the term 'defection' would thus mean and include both an act of disaffection with one party or independent plat form as also of developing a new political allegiance either by joining out right, the other party or by voting with and against one's own party. It would cover changes of party affiliation both from the opposition to the government side or vice versa as also changes between the parties on the same side of the house, i.e., between the constituent units of a coalition government or between the different parties sitting on the opposition benches."

Thus, defection implies the shifting of one's political allegiance, culminating in the severance of his connection from a party with

different motives, i.e., some political gain or consideration of some reward. It is a political crime. The defector is a political culprit forfeiting his right to represent people. In this present political set up defectors are considered as welcome guests. They are purchased at a price they demand. It is an obnoxious practice which should be seriously viewed. Though anti defection bills have been passed in the parliament to prohibit defection it has failed to serve the desired purpose as is evident from practice.

Coalition System:

Coalition means combination or union. Coalition government means a cooperative arrangement under which different political parties or members of different political parties try to form the ministry or the government. This system constitutes a sister part of the clustering together of various groups or organizations for the specific purpose of sharing power, coalition system of government is a product of circumstances created by the results of the four general election. This experiment has been made in most of the states in the past. In some states, it has been successful and in some other states it has been a complete failure. It has been experimented in the centre also. The present government in India is a bright example of coalition government. The experience of the past conveys the message that coalition politics has put severe strain on the working of our parliamentary system of government. It has represented the most unscrupulous exercise in the sphere of political opportunism. "The politics of unscrupulous combinations manifested such a fluid situation that the line of demarcation between the government and the opposition lost its clarity and preciseness in most of the cases owing to the conditions of political stalemate and large scale shifting of political affiliations and allegiances."5 Thus, coalition politics is very much influenced by the whims and caprices of people of different parties temporarily united for achieving some personal gain or collective gain. It is just like clay; it may make god or devil. It may crack or shatter but it will have no positive impact in the functioning of the government. This system has direct bearing with defection. It may form, reform or deform the government.

Pressure Group Politics in India:

The study of pressure group politics has become a subject of momentous significance in the political system of India. The pressure group that exists in India is multidimensional in nature. It

includes business group, labour group, agrarian group, community associations, institutional association, non-associational and anomic group. An analytical observation of the role of pressure group in Indian politics reveals that it has played so predominant a role so that without it the government may not be formed. There is a close interaction between pressure group and the party in power. Not only on interest groups, enjoy a greater degree of concentration, but the government with which they deal also is more highly centralized than ours, greater power to exert pressure is linked up with greater power to act. Whether that power to act will be used or not will depend upon various factors.

The studies on pressure groups in other democracies suggest that in general they follow British rather than American practices, but the main point that they demonstrate is that pressure groups play significant roles in the politics and government of all modern democratic systems. There is little doubt that pressure groups have powerful impacts upon the policy forming processes of every modern democratic polity. They are not, of course, the only political groups that have such impacts. In every democracy, political parties have some influence on the shape of public policy, and in many democracies they have more direct and obvious influence than the pressure groups. In addition, there is no doubt that the many formal agencies of government are more than mere collections of robots whose activities are entirely controlled by such extra governmental forces as pressure groups and parties, pressure groups have a significant impact upon public policy in a democracy like India. The role of pressure group in Indian politics reveals that it presents a very confusing and perplexing spectacle and the consequence is disastrous.

Conclusion:

Above discussed irregularities or problems of democracy are only a few. There are still major number of problems and challenges, such as corruption, communalism, casteism, etc. The Indian democracy to be come successful, these should be corrected. For this purpose, there is need for comprehensive electoral reforms. The rule makers should have to give attention in this regard.

Notes and References:

1. Asirvatham, Eddy, Political Theory, p. 446.
2. Quoted by Fisher, The Republication Tradition in Europe, p. 325.

3. Johari, J.C., Indian Government and Politics, Vishal Publications, New Delhi, 1991, p. 823.

4. Kashyap, S.C., The Politics of Defection, pp. 12-13.

5. Johari, J.C., Indian Government and Politics, Vishal Publications, Delhi, 1919. p. 907.