



DISCOVERING THE CHANGING DIMENSIONS OF DEMOCRACY AND INDIAN POLITICS

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Introduction

In contemporary times, the terms democracy, development, and citizen participation in a gamut of political structures have received special momentum in the academic discourse, particularly in the social sciences. In this context, the perennial political conflicts among political parties neither focus on public intensity nor build up a cohesive and strong political unity. In this regard, democracy plays a pivotal role in peacefully resolving disputes, as it believes in the peaceful and genuine transfer of power and the resolution of conflicts through dialogue and negotiations (Hensy, 2023). India, the world's largest democracy, has been experiencing a democratic decline (Behl 2022). However, most significant attempts have been made by political and social scientists and researchers to unravel the continuing factors that are immensely responsible for government compliance, devaluing individuals freedom, corruption, violence, and contention during both election and non-election times, particularly in Indian states (Jason & Carney, 2013). One may ask: if we have the largest constitution and democracy in the world and even our blood is democracy, then why are we continuously claiming rights, freedom, a corruption-free state, gender justice, and the annihilation of caste? Because each and every individual has their own sense of reason to judge themselves as far as their quality and wisdom are concerned. For the average Indian citizen, however, corruption, political conflicts, religious fundamentalism, casteism, and those closely associated with heinous activities have been a paramount and challenging situation that crystallizes the new form of movement and exploitation in India. In addition, the persistence of growing inequalities in Indian society of various kinds has been a major contributory factor in holding back the democratic potential (Hasan, 2016). The anti-corruption movement, protests against privatization, and gender justice are visible reminders of the failed promise of democracy.

Although democracy has intrinsic value as it protects citizens' life, liberty, rights, and property, the quality of living standard of citizens in Indian society has some differences in practices. Politics and elections in India, as in the India of the 1930s and 1940s, continue to be shaped by community and faction to a much greater degree than in any other country attaining liberal democratic ideals on the Western model (Jayal, 2013). The fact remains that India is a secular country with a strong faith in unity in diversity and an exclusive faith in respect for equal rights for all. In this diversified social structure, many leaders come and go, but the debacle experiences of weaker sections, women, and backward classes remain unchanged. Many developing countries like India include such instrumental arrangements as constitutional rights, effective courts, responsive government and electoral systems, functioning parliaments and assemblies, open and free media, and participatory institutions of local governance (Dreze & Sen, 2005).

However, despite gigantic commitments, the new trend of practice of democracy, particularly in India, has failed to represent various aspects of socio-economic services that citizens' involvement in the planning, execution, and monitoring of developmental programs. The United Nations took a historic decision in 1992 that there must be a 'good governance' system at both the rural and urban levels with a cooperative, progressive, and genuine transfer of power to the bottom level (Keping, 2018). But the current functions of the political system, however, reduce the people's opportunities and freedom of expression in developmental discourse. Over the past 21 years, India has undergone a process of market-oriented economic reforms that have gone hand-in-hand with a 'modernisation' programme for development (Mathur, 2013). The nuances of the democratic reform thus opened up a new space for dominant groups to castigate the moral values of democratic evolutions. Sometimes, elected leaders are located at the crucial nodes of the political system, such as the federal government, regional states, district headquarters, and local government. They are ubiquitous, ensconced in public commissions, departments of the government, semi-official bodies, political parties, and movements, and other arenas of public and sometimes private life (Mitra, 2021). Moreover, they may be regarded as a heterogeneous body because they



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come from different sections of society, including different religions and ethnic groups. If they are the deciders or policymakers of societal developmental goals, first we must seek to stress what distinguishes them from their fellow citizens in a democratic, decentralized mechanism system. Therefore, the existence of rational elite groups, particularly in a Third World democracy, is sufficient to mitigate caste rigidity, corruption, poverty, and lowering the autocratic power of an authority to make the people more self-sufficient and live an honorable life.

In contrast, we may have a general sense of understanding that, despite constitutional guarantees of equal citizenship and special provisions for disadvantaged groups, mere development has fallen far too considerably on those disadvantaged by their identities of caste, tribe, religion, and gender. These groups are historically depressed, unequal, isolated, and impured by the upper strata (Ambedkar 2021). By taking this broadly, one may raise several questions about why, despite having these strong constitutional mechanisms, there is constant mob-lynching, women's harassment, communal conflicts, crimes, and an increase in fundamentalism, illiteracy, poverty, corruption, and single-sided propagation. Is our democracy imperilled, or are the rent-seeking groups really trying to reduce socio-economic and political diseases in society? The answer to this question is that one may not promise to give a single answer because in a diverse society, particularly in the Indian context, there may be critical opinions and logical arguments, and several may express different experiences that should not undermine the inclusionary provisions of the Constitution, which had already promised free expression and free legal aids like health and food. To gain some theoretical knowledge, we first seek to rethink both the Indian and Western models of democracy and how philosophers see democracy differently from their own perspectives and functional aspects.

Conceptualizing Democracy

As we see, each sovereign state in the world adopted their government as per their social practices; one may have a democratic model and another may have an autocratic model¹. As far as democracy is concerned, our present-day plight brings to the fore that democracy is "government by discussion" (Sartori, 1987). Owing to the new version of social practices throughout the world, most countries have adopted the democratic form of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. India is no exception in this regard. In India, the prospect of democracy has received many compliments, with many declaring India as a mother of democracy. It is also true that each nation in the world has its own genesis of democracy by augmenting their social practices, which confirms whether to accept a democratic or autocratic form of governance. The distinguishing features of Indian democracy can be traced back to the Vedas, Puranas, Mahabharata, and Kautilya's Arthashastra². By citing these predominant social satires, it poses several questions about democracy, administration, and public participation in the state apparatus system. Is there any serious indication of democracy? The answer to this question may vary from person to person, leading to moderate answers. Of course, the traditional predominant social structures had specific consensus orientations and inclusiveness. As the Honorable Prime Minister of India, Mr. Narendra Modi stated that the Veda and Mahabharata and all historical references prove that non-hereditary rulers first existed in India in his address in the summit for democracy in New Delhi on March 29, 2023 (Haidar, 2023). It would be difficult to find out the roots of Indian democracy and its constitutive tendencies.

The achievements of democracy depend not only on the rules and procedures that are adopted and safeguarded but also on the way the opportunities are used by the citizens (Sen, 1999). At the moment, under dictatorship rule, people essentially do not need to think and choose, even if they do not give their consent. This lesson was witnessed in the Philippines, Germany, and Italy, where political experience was barely unhealthy (Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018). Post-1857, it became clear that India was going to adopt, albeit gradually, some form of democratic governance (Mehta, 2022). But it took at least ninety years before, in 1947, India became free from torture, exploitation, and oppression from the British. Since the 1950s, India has been internationally recognized as a sovereign state with sovereign, democratic, and republic as its fundamental nature. Later, the words secular, social, and fraternity were added to the preamble by the 42nd Amendment of the Constitution in 1976. And people initially became the source of all authority and were endowed with fundamental rights for their personality development and economic growth. Not only India but also several other countries have accepted the democratic model, which ensures the protection of civil rights, freedom, and life and the fair distribution of common resources among



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the poor. Hence, we can rethink both Indian and Western philosophy and the ideals of philosophers who have boldly invested their valuable time to keep constitutionalism and democracy intact.

Democracy in Indian Context

The commitments of Indian philosophers to make India more democratic, progressive, and cooperative are well documented. These philosophers are motivated to serve the Indian people in a democratic way, irrespective of their sustaining social positions. Moreover, democracy is fundamentally all about power relations among members of society and among social groups (Palshikar, 2019). The voice of democracy has been accentuated in India since its independence. It is significant to say that India has had a longer history of democracy with its conversation through the national movement demand for complete independence and self-rule. Some of the contributors to Indian democracy, such as Kautilya, Savitribai Phule, Periyar, Ramabai, Rajaram Mohan Roy, Naroji, Tilak, Bhagat Singh, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, M. K. Gandhi, Patel, Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, J. P. Narayan, and others, made significant contributions to the democratic system of government in India from the ancient to the modern era. Significant changes took place when our sacred constitution came into force on January 26, 1950, though it was adopted on November 26, 1949. On this 26th day of November, we Indians celebrate our constitution day with confidence that we are Indian, firstly and lastly (Ambedkar).

Swaraj and participatory democracy were the two aims of Gandhi; social democracy, on the other hand, was Ambedkar's vision to enlighten the depressed classes from the darkness. There was a disagreement between these philosophers about making separate democratic values. Eventually, it settled on putting reservations for depressed classes in all public spheres. However, Ambedkar didn't endorse political democracy because he showed that Indian society is full of caste rigidity, humiliation, and pollution of human beings. These practices would never help Indians make political democracy successful; they must be eliminated from our society. Therefore, social democracy was essentially needed for the success of democracy. The democratic power structure was surfaced and eventually converted to authoritarian rule during Mrs. Indira Gandhi's period, when there were a series of economic and political crises and she declared national "emergency" in 1975. She vehemently misused her power by sending opposition leaders to jail, imposing heavy press censorship, and ramming through constitutional amendments to limit the power of the judiciary and enhance executive powers (Oldenburg, 2007). If we make an argument during the hegemonic rule of Congress, the democracy had by the time declined due to a lack of willingness, a lack of understanding about democratic values, and ignorance by rent-seeking political party members. But post-independence had witnessed a significant value-based and public-oriented democracy, particularly in Nehru's period, because he was closely associated with people and had continued to act as a tutor for India's democracy. After Nehru, the Congress suffered from political crises that led to party splits, lost popular support, and brought oppositions together to form a coalition government. The decline of Congress's hegemony left space for other political developments: the rise of a Bharatiya Janata Party (1980), especially in India's Hindi-speaking 'heartland' that became visible in north-central and western India; and the new regional parties in West Bengal, Kashmir, and Punjab successfully created (Kohli, 2009). Despite these crises, the Congress regained its power in the early 1990s and further remained in power with several commitments or promises.

Taking this account into the 21st century, although political and social transformation is taking place in Indian society, the real power, freedom, rights, and property have not been transferred to the disadvantaged sections. For this, it needs a grand debate on why the net value of democracy has declined in the last decade. If political fragmentation became the new trend in India's democracy, the politics would now be a lot more unstable, with more public unrest and political instability than they were before.

Although there are continuous social and political developments, the mere expectations of citizens under this hegemonic power structure must be democratized and liberalized. Political parties, whether national or regional, must be fully capable of forging a stable democratic government. Accidentally, governments sometimes play such an insignificant role that government secrecy percolates to all government functionaries and offices, resulting in harassment of citizens and the hiding of corrupt practices (Palshikar, 2017). To stop these practices, many activists, social, and political organisations had a long



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battle for the right to information to make the governance system more transparent and vigilant in its functional domain, and finally, officially, the Right of Information (RTI) Act was created in 2005. The purpose of the creation of this institution is to create a culture of transparency and effective monitoring and implementation of the RTI. But several studies revealed that there is a lack of transparent governance and hardly any accountability in the real sense. The constant struggle for making the governance system more accountable and transparent lasted when people's ombudsman were established in India in 2013. Since then, the substantive error at the official level has been minimized. But terms such as transparency and accountability are still a distant dream, and it seems the institutions of the ombudsman are either invisible or ineffective (Palshikar, 2017). Be a representative or bureaucrat; he must do his duly assignments in such a manner that people may well respond, and politically, he or she may be rewarded both at the national and state levels. But we may find a small number because corruption has become an occupation for politicians. Politics, thus, has become a business-like preoccupation, and leaders calculate the returns on the political and economic investment they made to win the elections (Sarangi, 2016). If people are dissatisfied with their elected representatives, they have a cue to replace the government, which is best understood by present political analysts. It has been observed that India's democracy still endures, but frequent elections are failing to produce a stable and effective government (Kohli, 2009). The details of the issues have been outlined in the preceding sections. Earlier, the voting was largely fair and peaceful. But the recent election results reveal that there is an increasing use of money, muscle, power, and sometimes wine during the panchayat and the general elections, which led to killing the electorate for political benefits, and as a result, it makes it difficult to understand the true democratic values. We cannot really say these are the good shines of democracy that always avoid bloodshed. Therefore, democracy, decentralisation, and participation are closely linked with each other and equally responsible for creating a transparent government, economic development, and social justice for weaker sections of society.

Western Conception of Democracy

Until recently, it was widely assumed that Western societies would be governed by moderate political parties committed to liberal democracy, open competition, open economies, and multilateral cooperation (Norris, 2017). However, in western political thought, the notion of democracy and its values have been captured by a good chunk of philosophers. Many Western analysts categorically state that democracy can only prosper if it is defended and advanced by Western powers (Youngs, 2019). To re-imagine the traditional outlook of democratic mechanisms, more efforts have to be made to extract the extreme dominance of power over states rather than patriarchal dominance. Most of the research highlighted that democracy's appeal and strength have largely resulted from Western economic power structures that lead to wane these structures on the one hand, and democracy will lose its moral worldwide appeal on the other.

In this context, from the beginning, from Aristotle to Marx, social and political democracy have become influential subjects in understanding the state apparatus. To put it crudely, each philosopher has narrated democracy in their own way to conceptualize its necessity. The political landscape with an epistemological claim to put together public morality, freedom of expression, and the right to dissent in a democracy was the central thrust of some Western analysts, which is closely associated with other disciplines as well (Masferrer, 2023). Therefore, freedom of expression is one of the most important fundamental rights in modern democratic societies to express one's opinion in public.

John Robert Seeley, an English historian, stated, '*History without political science has no fruit, and political science without history has no root.*' In this connection, the existence of all disciplines should not be undermined because all have its internal link. It is more likely to say that in these contemporary times, we often use interdisciplinary studies to understand social, economic, and political phenomena. Though political science has two thousand years of experience, the mere expectations are to evaluate and re-examine power politics and the nature of democracy, which are already documented. During seventeenth-century social contract theory, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau perceived that the state originated through the contract between people to preserve themselves, secure their life, liberty, and property, and that the general will would pay significant attention to making a welfare state. The main objective of contract theory was to provide a deeper understanding of political authority and could be used to design political structures capable of withstanding the forces of dissolution that produce civil war (LEWIS, 1984). The French Revolution (1789) and the American Declaration of



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Independence (1776) are two of the most important events in history that tell us about the evolution of rights, liberty, justice, political equality, and universal brotherhood. It has been witnessed that the French people had strong and sincere sympathy with the struggle of their forefathers for independence, and the people in America were unselfish in their desire for the success of their country's independence (Perkins, 1904).

John Rawls, J.S. Mill, Martha Nussbamb, Mary Wollstorncraft, Jeremy Bentham, Benjamin Barber, James S. Fishkin, Robert Dahl, Carole Pateman, Geovani Sartori, Alexis de Tocqueville, Habermas, and other impressive thinkers are well figured in the contemporary discourse on democracy. Most of the thinkers have claimed that the value and vision of democracy have become unhealthy, with an aimless and unscientific character that cannot really fulfill the real desires and interests of the citizens. States of the non-Western world have developed a modest range of forms of democracy that are public-supported and sometimes regarded as complete anathema. But western democracies have a unique temperament and a strong commitment to fostering democracy as a global norm (Youngs, 2019). In contrast to this grand debate, it is pertinent to have a fresh look in India, where critics have accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government failing to protect minority rights, social justice, social harmony, and constitutional government and sometimes of stoking intolerance, as these trends are afoot in most of the states in the world, like in Indonesia.

After a great review of the literature, the practice of democracy and the nature of leaders have some variation in their ideals. The thorough literature on several democratic practices and their roots in Western society and their influence on Indian society has become a major debate in academic discourse. Literature has thrown up several questions about the problem of democracy, citizens' rights and liberties, women's security, the protection of human rights, and the responsibility of rent-seeking groups towards building a harmonic society, particularly in the Indian context. Although most of the literature is confined to the theoretical exposition of democratic problems, this paper tries to delve into the complex interplay between union government actions and its citizens. The paper also outlines important conceptual issues of democracy, such as the rule of law, rights, and liberties, and discusses the relationship between elected leaders and the citizens thereof.

Methodology

For the study, descriptive research design has been used to understand the complexity of India's democracy in such a way to obtain a broad idea about democratic practices in this multidimensional society. The article uses secondary data which is already available in the books, newspapers, articles, research reports, journals and reports of international organisations. To obtain more knowledge about new trend to democratic practices in India, I used different events and data from political world based on empirical methods and subtle statistical models to understand the nature of democracy and its different functional aspects.

Exploring the New Trend of Democracy: In Indian Context

The central discussion of this paper is to analyze the nature of the new age of democracy, which seeks to foreground the inherent tensions between citizens, elected leaders, and government that have reached new heights in the last few years. Most recently, the moment manifested itself in the victory of the BJP in the general election in India in 2014.

The emergence of right-wing political power in Indian democracy brought out new experiences that wracked the governance system steadily. The arrest of all wicked behaviour of elected representatives in their political playground, both on-camera and off-camera, has failed, as several studies have claimed that there are inherent contradictions among party leaders, capitalists, and democracy. India's experience with democracy is anomalous because Indian society is one of the few societies where political revolution preceded to social one (Mehta, 2022). He cited Tocqueville's most important work as a great contrast between two ways of conceiving the relationship between social and political equality. First, he visualized in America the peculiar absence of feudalism and inherent social equality. On the other hand, in France, for many centuries, social equality was shaped by Christianity, which ultimately brought about a social revolution and overthrew the aristocracy. Hence, we need a grand debate on the Indian context because the nationalist movements are characterized by several social reforms insisting upon ideological demands for equality and legitimizing the state functionary with the help of a set of rules



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and regulations. Each of these is, amongst other things, an assertion of the nature of the current government's response to corruption, crime, unemployment, and violations of human rights, contention, and citizens' identities in a fragmented society like India. Politics in India, however, is a peculiar way of assertive and alive that gives politics its appeal and its edge (Mehta, 2022).

Millennium development goals have assured citizens to fulfil individuals' collective interests as well as minimize the sorrow, misery, and others of the individuals at the global level. It is only possible when democracy is consistent with constitutionalism and the elected head of state deals with humans' day-to-day common affairs. It is most pertinent to say if we look at the role of contemporary mainstream political parties, the role of media, and the role of political leaders in exercising their power, and how they provide justice and ensure social solidarity without encroachment of others rights. The recent experience with functional aspects of the Indian democratic system brought out several challenges in order to understand the nature of Indian democracy. The peculiar thing is that there is such political upheaval and constant threat to individuals' all-round development, and economic development is an exception in this regard. Is democracy a myth concept? The answer to this question may vary from individual to individual, which can remove the ambiguities in our minds if we adopt a fresh look.

Democracy under 73rd and 74th Amendment Act

Since the 73rd and 74th Amendments were ratified in 1992, the concept of democracy has again gained significant traction in India (Malik, 2022). Since its inception, local, state, and national democracy have become major topics of discussion in academic disciplines. The World Bank, therefore, first introduced the term 'Good Governance' in its report 'Governance and Development' in 1992 to accelerate or strengthen grass-roots democracy (Tripathi, 2017). Further, it was assumed there must be major characteristics such as participation, rule of law, equity, consensus orientation, efficiency and inclusiveness, responsiveness, transparency, and accountability to make the government more vigilant, transparent, and accountable to the common people³. This can be possible if there is a responsive and constitutional government with effective management of the social and economic resources of the concerned states. India is not an exception in this regard, though its earlier stages had declined due to a lack of enthusiasm, lack of willingness, lack of knowledge about the concepts, and negligence from both the central and state governments (Malik & Smita, 2021). But eventually, it further germinated its democratic practices with the consolidation of new provisions.

Democracy today faces numerous challenges, such as economic insecurity and inequality, identity politics, clientelism, authoritarian threats, and technological developments⁴. India has witnessed several democratic challenges, such as religious fundamentalism, poverty, corruption, illiteracy, communalism, and others, inflicted on the political environment. However, the issue of gender biases in Indian politics cannot be skipped because, in the Indian political system, gender disparity in political debate and discussion is presented everywhere (Malik, 2023). But if we look at the other side, India is being praised internationally for its tie-ups with other nations focusing on economic development, implying that India will have a \$5 trillion economy by 2024. Modi's commitments, promises, and overarching vision are typical of its ambitions. The Prime Minister also highlighted a few major challenges in his speeches, and through this, he further regained power (Baru, 2020). Several initiatives have also been taken into consideration, including water conservation, the elimination of single-use plastic, improved healthcare facilities, and housing for all communities, irrespective of their social existence. These initiatives must be welcomed to strengthen the country's economic growth and improve the living standards of its citizens as well. If one is interested in knowing the economic development during the second paradigm of the Modi government, these are the major areas to focus on. Because everyone must accept that any government, regardless of their party ideology, has binary contradictions containing both pros and cons. Modi's nationalism is based on right-wing Hinduism, his advocacy of business, his neutrality over minority rights, poverty, the free press, the judiciary and legislative processes, and India's plural religious traditions (Rao, 2018).



Modi's Foreign Policy and Historic Decisions

In order to fully grasp Indian foreign policy, it has to be placed in the long experience of its character, which may delve into the complex contradictions among political parties. The debate from Nehru to Modi over foreign policy has received many ups and downs. But this article just touches on the new foreign policy in the last few years. However, over the last few years, India has been witnessing significant changes in foreign policy strategies externally. As Sumit Ganguly (2015) pointed out, 'there is little question that the new foreign policy under Modi's leadership constitutes a departure from India's stance of the past.' In the absence of systematic change, the Modi government's policy thrust is in continuation with that of its predecessors (Chandra, 2017). No doubt, during this government, the leadership and domestic variables also played a significant role in changing the character of foreign policy compared to the previous government. It is important to say that India also played an important role at the international level in the non-alignment principle during the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022. India, in this regard, had a strong desire to prevent other actors in their power structures from limiting its own room maneuver (Mohan, 2008). In the first month of Modi's second tenure, he took historic decisions that were most controversial, such as revoking the special autonomy of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, criminalizing the practice of 'triple talaq', implementing the NRC for the state of Assam, and enacting CAA, which later received several criticisms on the basis of religion (Baru, 2020). Gradually, it became a great threat to the country's economic growth.

Parties, elected representatives and their Positions in Democratic Place

The above backdrop makes us realize the current situation of democracy in some of the countries, referring to both democratic and non-democratic nations worldwide in general and in India in particular. Different practices of democracy bring different meanings and different experiences, but the fact is that which form of government is the best that ensures a just society and a transparent government? With this, we have to look at the level of political activities, parties and leaders behaviours with the help of data published by Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). By using the data, we have categorically analyzed how different factors are asymmetrically responsible for affecting the democratic process and how rent-seeking groups constantly hold power to undermine all democratic values. Party funding, party income, the leader's crime records, and other parameters have become a major concern because during an election, spending a huge amount of money and other money on advertisements for winning the election seems only for the sake of political interests for personal gain. But we must have a clear picture of their source of income for all parties, their nature of works and services to the people on the one hand, and keeping democratic values alive on the other. Here are some reports published by ADR to provide a clear understanding of party members' criminal cases, as follows:

Table 1: Candidates with Declared Criminal Cases: 2009, 2014, And 2019

Lok Sabha Election Year	Total Number of Candidates Analyzed	Number of Candidates With Declared Criminal Cases	Percentage of Candidates with Declared Criminal Cases	Number of Candidates With Declared Serious Criminal Cases	Percentage of Candidates with Declared Serious Criminal Cases
2009	7810	1158	15%	608	8%
2014	8205	1404	17%	908	11%
2019	7928	1500	19%	1070	13%

Source: ADR

Table 1 represents the criminal cases of candidates, irrespective of their party affiliation, who perceive themselves as leaders. There is a significant increase in the numbers in each general election. To declare a candidate to have serious criminal cases,



certain important criteria were there, such as if a candidate committed a crime, the maximum punishment being five years or more, an offense that was non-bailable, offences that were assault, murder, kidnapping, rape-related, crimes against women, and others.

As per the recent report published by ADR, especially in the Indian electoral process, the report brought out important insights related to criminal cases against candidates during Lok Sabha elections in 2019. To understand this, we must prepare to delve into the relationship between existing political parties and their candidates' criminal cases. As per the current data for the 2019 Lok Sabha election, 55 candidates have declared cases related to murder (Indian Penal Code Section 302), 184 candidates have declared cases of attempts to murder (IPC Section 307), and 126 candidates have declared cases related to crimes against women. Out of 126 candidates, 9 have declared cases related to rape (IPC Section 376), 47 have declared cases related to kidnapping, and 95 have declared cases related to hate speech. If we look at the party-wise candidates with criminal cases, we may find that out of 433 candidates, 175 (40 per cent) are from the BJP, out of 419 candidates, 164 (39 per cent) from INC, out of 381 candidates, 85 (22 per cent) from BSP, out of 69 candidates, 40 (58 per cent) from CPI (M), and out of 3370 independent candidates, only 400 (12 per cent) have declared criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits. If we look at the party-wise candidates with serious criminal cases, out of 433 candidates, 124 (29 per cent) from the BJP, out of 419 candidates, 107 (26 per cent) from the INC, out of 381 candidates, 61 (16 per cent) from the BSP, 24 (35 per cent) out of 69 candidates fielded by the CPI (M), and out of 3370 independent candidates, only 292 (9 per cent) have declared criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits. Here we can visualize the level of criminal cases against party members during their affidavit, but instead the crime reduces the maximum number of cases we can find during the 2019 general election. If we compare the three general elections (2009, 2014, and 2019), the crime rate against candidates is increasing, which has become a serious discussion in academic discourse because this matter completely signals a threat to democracy, and it would not take less time to corrode it. The increasing nature of Hindu nationalism and the force to create a Hindu Rashtra are also another indication of how they undermine the nature of India and its secularism.

The similar cases we can find if we see the party-wise crorepati candidate during submission of their property statement *in the* 2019 general election. Out of 433 candidates, 361 (83 per cent) are from the BJP, out of 419 candidates, 348 (83 per cent) are from the INC, out of 381 candidates, 127 (33 per cent) are from the BSP, 25 (36 per cent) out of 69 candidates fielded by the CPI (M), 20 (59 per cent) out of 34 candidates fielded by the NCP, and 506 (15 per cent) out of 3370 independent candidates have declared assets worth more than Rs. 1 crore. Here we can find that two national parties have higher assets than other national parties. As we see how capitalists and elite groups produce their capital, they also produce contentions, poverty, inequality in wealth, and inequalities in income. One may ask the question of whether this perennial and hegemonic power structure will continue or if it will overcome all aspects of inequalities such as rising hatred, caste oppression, fundamentalism, corruption, and other social trauma. And gender inequality in parliament and their involvement in democratic space are hardly achieved.

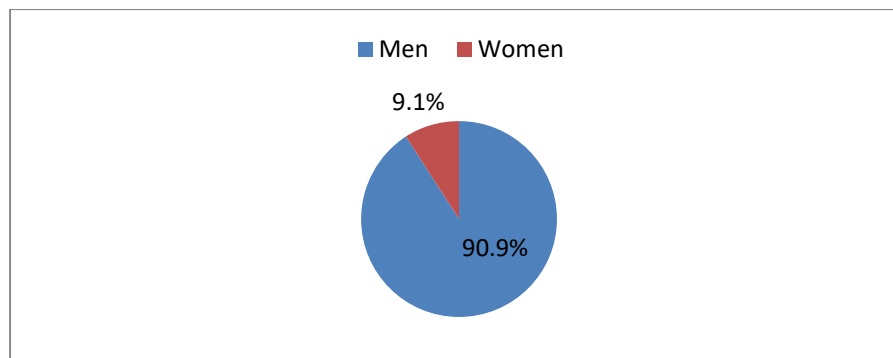


Figure 1: Analysis of candidates on the basis of gender



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Source: Overall Gender Report in 2019 General Election by ADR

Figure 1 represents the gender inequality in the electoral process as well as their participation in leading leadership. This result completely signifies that although the idea of patriarchy has dominated the social hierarchy system, particularly in India, gender equality and transformation in the political field still need to be achieved. It has been observed that no political party in the world has been born to cure all the social maladies in their ideological commitment because this often fails to create a just and healthy democratic society. Elected leaders involvement in crime, corruption, and distortion is not good shine for the democracy but somehow underlines the self-proclaimed ideas that some political party members have. Parties must stay away from hidden agendas through inculcation to enhance job opportunities, develop infrastructure and housing, and promote minimum government to maximum governance (Ashok, 2022). This slogan is often associated with PM Narendra Modi's speech to make governance more sincere and progress-oriented. To make this slogan more accentuated, we must deeply go through the process of fortifying the democratic practices that would make the reader more visible about current government practices. Democracy, somehow, has weathered other crises—that the opposition was jailed by an authoritarian regime in 1975, the imposition of state censorship, and the separatist movement in Punjab (Oldenburg). The incumbent government vehemently undermined the constitutional morality with which people had to suffer. Later, this resulted in a big defeat for Congress due to manifestations of emergency. But it may not come again to impose human restrictions by elected leaders over common people that may bring negative influence to the current government.

It has been seen that the BJP has used the existing constitutional agencies on sedition, defamation, and counterterrorism to constantly demonize targeted minority communities, deprive them of their citizenship rights, and turn them into noncitizens (Chatterji, Hasen, and Jaffrelot 2019). The mere aspirations of citizens have been declined. The rule of law has to some extent deteriorated, the rights and liberties of citizens have been curtailed, and academicians and the media have been silenced (Ganguly 2019; 2020). However, the inclusive vision of Indian democracy has experienced democratic stagnation since the BJP came to power.

A Mixed Assessment and Major Discussions

In order to fully grasp the Indian democratic system, it is necessary to figure out the inclusivity and involvement of leaders in such activities. Here are some facts to be accepted as true by a particular analysis made with the help of different narratives, perhaps the conflicts and rival perspectives in the Indian democratic system. In particular, it seems that every conflict, antagonism, and analysis of the political framework would lead to empowerment and political consciousness among citizens (Jayal, 2021). Theories of democracy envisage the equivocal interpretation of different political dialogues, varying in ideological directions. Yet, it is plausible to discover how different ideologies play a vital role in addressing the problems of social inequality, pluralism, economic development, international links, and other complexities that are characteristics of modern nation-states. Because theorists have argued that liberal democratic arrangements failed to address the problems of social issues, inequality, and complexity in modern societies (Bohman, 1996). Therefore, citizens' trust in the government and the implications of policies rely on competent groups whose greatness is to promote social harmony, reduce communal conflicts, and believe in equity and inclusive democracy. Reducing capitalism by giving more attention to the working class is accepted in Marxian ideals. But India is not an exception in giving more focus to capitalists on the one hand, less attention to local barriers, leadership quality, communal conflicts, and being more likely to disseminate religious ideas on the other. This would not help policymakers and rent-seeking groups reduce crucial issues or prevent a leader from becoming a tyrant. The only way to mitigate this is to negate or modify liberal democratic arrangements and pay attention to participatory and deliberative democracy from the top to the bottom.

This is pertinent to highlight the economic strategy undertaken by the central government in the last five years. During this period, India has been facing several economic challenges, and the ruling BJP's agenda for an economic boost is another significant step taken into consideration. The first term of Modi's promise in 2014 has been successful in its first two years. After demonetisation, the party's objectives remain critical for India's development..



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Democracy during Covid-19 Pandemic

In the last three years, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in many countries around the world has witnessed a serious threat to humans' lives, democracy, and economic growth. India is not an exception in this regard, because the first case was identified in the state of Kerala on January 27, 2020, and a 20-year-old female person was affected. And it had set alarm bells ringing almost in all the countries in the world. A sudden announcement of lockdown, particularly in India because the coronavirus had to be contained at four hours' notice, left workers jobless and without money and food to survive in most of the cities, and no trains or buses to take them home (Jayal, 2021). Subsequently, millions, including pregnant women, children, daily laborers, and adults, were affected more by walking homeward, covering hundreds of miles, in blistering heat without food or water. It has been reported that several hundred people died while they started walking homewards in road accidents or were run over by a train. This may greatly affect citizens lives and rights on the one hand and democracy, economics, education, and health on the other. The health crisis intensified while India's democracy was already experiencing backsliding. It is pertinent to say that the novel coronavirus has wreaked havoc on public health in most of the countries, but it has caused serious catastrophic destruction in five powerful democracies in the world: the United States, India, the Philippines, Brazil, and Indonesia (Kurlantzick, 2021). Moreover, this novel coronavirus created social and economic inequality, and democracy underwent great alarm, imposing greater restrictions on people's democratic rights, political opposition, and citizen's participation (Jayal, 2021). In India, although there are many health-care systems that function ineffectively for the poor, including minorities and women. The pandemic greatly hampered the governance system, undermined human rights and the democratic system, and posed a range of new challenges to democracy.

Farmers Protest and other Miscellaneous

The dialectics of majority-minority, however, intensified due to the emergence of new political polarization among party members. More recently, India has witnessed how Hindutva groups and a large section of pro-BJP supporters and media initiated a new discourse of nationalism (Ahmed 2022). The binary conflict on the basis of the social and cultural aspects of the Hindus and the Muslims is, to some extent, unsolvable. Issues such as the cow protection movement, protection of girls from love-jihad, growth of the Muslim population, the Ram temple in Ayodhya, and the ban on triple talaq/introduction of UCC were the constitutive elements of this Hindutva-driven discourse of nationalism (Ahmed, 2022). This aggressive nature of Indian Hindus led to a new kind of hatred relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims. Even violence against Muslims—lynching, women's rape, child rape, molestation, and Dalit torture—has been an important feature of violence. Apart from that, Adivasi movements and farmers' movements have also influenced the government to make policy again or to repeal the anti-farmers bill retrospectively. Farmer unions from states like Punjab, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh demanded a legal guarantee on Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for their agricultural crops. Several claimed that the bill was in the favor of capitalists or *Mandi* contractors; farmers had little benefit from that. Moreover, their claim was not ended, even though chaos erupted when several protesters broke through the police barricades and said the law enacted by the central government would dismantle the MSP (Mint 2021). It has been noticed that the middle class was absent from the protest sites; probably they got their information through pro-government TV channels, and they neither have the courage nor the courage to show any news about the farmers protest in Delhi (The Wire, 2021). Eventually, the central government repealed the farmers' law due to massive mass protests in Delhi. As per the official report, more than seven hounded farmers died during the protest⁵. Here, one may ask the question: What are the factors responsible for the farmers' deaths? How the government responded to them at the national capital in Delhi. The answer to the question is clear: the leaders decided to bring new laws for farmers' development, but this law had several anomalies, which led to a grand mass protest.

However, if we look at the last two decades of democratic experiences, particularly in India, we have witnessed violence, corruption, contention, casteism, mob lynching, women's harassment, and other irrational activities as its basic challenges. The recent surge of violations in the state of Manipur seems to be a complete threat to human rights and to the inhuman



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treatment of women, which are not exceptions in this regard. Of these, we have to be more vigilant and be part of every course of action against these practices. The blatant actions would no longer be tolerated if both the central and state governments expanded their rationally accepted attitude toward these actions. In this regard, one may argue that democracy has failed to tackle social justice, gender justice, and the protection of the rights of citizens. Norway, Ireland, and Denmark occupied the top three positions in press freedom, while Vietnam, China, and North Korea constituted the bottom three. According to the latest report, India has slipped to 161 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index (The Hindu, 2023). This represents how our democratic process runs under such political leaders, as it is marked by low pressure from the public side rather than from media actions. However, the value of democracy is so encumbered by pain and the limited power of weaker sections that political leaders try to overshadow their superiority by demonstrating their dominance over helpless voters. Members of the party insider are not significantly responsible to the party leaders because they occupy the highest position, and leaders have less permissible for amicable solutions that are hardly achieved. Many cases have been witnessed of party members being active in unusual activities.

In contrast, numerical political parties often tend to flank people into their events. The move from democratic to non-democratic is determined by the voter's turnout in the election. It is pertinent to mention here that in India, political leaders are more likely to change their party affiliation with less confidence in their duties, even if they opt for other political parties with which they previously had a strong critical review. If an opponent claims other political party members for their involvement in a big scam and corruption, then how does the former opponent try to align with other party members? This is a big question that arises in the mind. Is it this washing machine that corruption converts the opposition party into a transparency party? Recently, it has been noticed in our political parties' behaviour that opponents always try to flank others into their party without alleging anything. The moment would no longer be sustained by its fragile character. Perhaps it is linked to the radical mindset of continuously using power, money, and muscle to gain political mileage while ignoring violence, corruption, and contentions. The direction of inequalities in India is upward mobility, which would break social and political solidarity, which has been its new form of model.

However, many comments are seen on TV channels and social media about the spirit of democracy and its multiple benefits being invariably dominated by one-sided politics that result in social, economic, and political inequalities in the country. Showing heroism of dominant character by upper strata over the lower has increased, and the SCs, STs, and women's torture has turned towards producing citizens with an indiscipline culture. Now, we are able to see how media houses cover the information and their horror of being silent over their own political party, which they support blindly and closely linked to make vote banks. The important question here is to what extent rent-seeking groups or political parties play a vital role in providing justice to the poor. Are they paying unbiased attention to extracting all barriers and the roots of violence and corruption? The answer to this question would have multiple variations. It certainly led to catastrophic human horror, and there would be a one-sided answer from current party (BJP) supporters. In this sense, we must go through some facts that are essential to understanding the economic conditions, global prestige, and use of government agencies for personal profit and welfare in the last year.

However, minorities hold political positions, and the majority can only choose the government. In this power-hegemonic structure, the majority should not compromise with rent-seeking groups' plans, policies, and party characteristics because the frustration, anger, poverty, hunger, and inequalities in certain places would never be uprooted from this punctured society. The rival relations among political parties would further strengthen the firsthand macabre experience of the downtrodden and disunity among various religious groups. Those who have already historically climbed the ladder of development and privilege should rethink the catastrophic conditions of others because we all, as human beings, have internal coordination and correlation. The multiple ideologies have multiple dialogues, but keeping in mind that political participation is a medium of talk where we reform party behavior and opt for the best one, what really happened is that we enjoyed our freedom only once every five years, as French philosopher Rousseau claimed. This is true in the sense that we all should take care of this attitude. Both central and state governments should put their unconditional dialogues into action to transform political parties and modify their powers and ideologies to satisfy the people's needs.



Conclusion and Suggestions

The above analysis of democratic practices, particularly in India, witnessed several shortcomings, and there is no unanimity both at the national and state levels. Most contemporary democratic societies, whether developing or developed, have witnessed many political upheavals with conflicting interests and a constant issue of diversity. The presence of tensions between the public and governments on diverse fields must be resolved if there is an amicable peace solution amongst power holders. The emergence of a new trend of democracy is inextricably responsible for economic development, employment opportunity, life security, the protection of human rights, and social justice in this mature democratic process. If we look at the future of citizens and government, we must educate and use checks and balances to control these practices. The life of democracy is in the hands of the common people, and they must play their significant role to protect the value of democracy on the one hand and citizen's basic fundamental needs on the other.

Moreover, democracy, decentralization, and participation would be successful in their functional aspects if there is a genuine transfer of powers from top to bottom. In other words, the most significant point here is that political leaders must stay away from favoritism and nepotism mindsets that could give enormous strength to the helpless people. But the absence of unanimity among parties seems to insist on undemocratic behavior, leading to deceptive thoughts. Political representatives, thus, divided by their ideological determinations must find the best ways to protect citizens rights, freedom, and constitutionalism with rampart framework. To revamp democratic practices, rigorous research studies need to be conducted to find out roots of problems and their solutions thereof.

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Notes

1. See <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/democracy>
2. See https://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/h_es/h_es_muhlb_democra_frameset.htm
3. See <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/good-governance.pdf>
4. See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/challenges-to-democracy>
5. See <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/750-died-during-farmers-protest-no-condolence-2602504> from-centre-rakesh-tikait-

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