

NEW HISTORY OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a comprehensive reinterpretation of the historical roots and evolution of Indian democracy, arguing that democratic values in the subcontinent long pre-date modern Western frameworks. Drawing upon ancient republican institutions such as the Gana and Sangha systems, the author positions India's early traditions of deliberation and collective decision-making as foundational elements of democratic thought. The work contrasts these indigenous practices with classical Western theories, suggesting that principles of popular participation permeated Indian political life well before colonial and post-colonial developments. It examines the challenges faced during the colonial period, highlighting the emergence of a sustained democratic ethos that gained definitive expression after independence with the establishment of universal adult suffrage, the Election Commission, and a constitutional order committed to inclusive governance. The article also reflects on intellectual debates within Indian political thought, including the differing visions of leaders like Gandhi and Ambedkar concerning power distribution between villages and cities. By situating India's democratic experience within both historical depth and contemporary political practice, the piece underscores the resilience and distinctive character of Indian democracy.

Keywords: Indian Democracy, Democratic Government, Historical Analysis, New History

ARTICLE

It is very hard to identify the perfect meaning of democracy, which is universally accepted. But we can identify the values, characteristics, and features of democracy. In a Western sense, democracy is almost a new practice in India, but it is a half-baked truth. There are also authors like Shirin Ebadi who presented a balanced view by saying, "Democracy doesn't recognize East or West; democracy is simply people's will. Therefore, I do not acknowledge that there are various models of democracy; there is just democracy itself".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Democracy summit hosted by the United States of America talks about ancient, elected republican city-states such as Lichhavi and Shakya, in the same summit he also mentioned the 10th-century Uttaramerur inscription that codified the principle of democratic participation.

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The early dominant scholar of politics and society like Manu and Chanakya however supported largely monarchy, but the role of the King was not authoritative, in their theory, it was democratic as Kautilya emphasized the king's role to provide justice peace and stability to their citizens. The evidence for non-monarchical government goes back to the Vedas but in the Buddhist period 600 B.C-200 A.D we witnessed a large set of such bodies. There was an organization like Gana and Sangha present in Ancient Indian Republics. Sengi, Puga or Vrata was important non-monarchical bodies. There were three other courts of a popular character called PUGA, SRENI and KULA. These were not constituted by the king. According to most western scholars, this non-monarchical ancient Indian Republic government setup was nearer to oligarchy but Robert Michels in his Iron law of oligarchy found that 'oligarchy, is inevitable as an "iron law" within any democratic organization as part of the "tactical and technical necessities" of the organization.

Democratic values are not foreign in the Indian sense these values had a historic past, which is respected by citizens of India. After Independence, many countries of the global south did not maintain their status quo. Countries like Pakistan converted into a deep state where the military became a state. The fake ideal promises of Jinnah in his first speech in constitutional assembly of Pakistan after partition of India remain in the underground as a seed. The tree of Inclusion never grows up in Pakistan. But Indian leaders accepted democracy as a form of government, and Nehru proposed the Indian Style of secularism.

India as a newly independent country tried to strengthen its democratic character. It was very surprising for the whole western world that the election commission of India was established in 1950 to conduct the elections. Without an election, democracy has no meaning. The election commission of India was hoping to create a history which was beyond the dreams of many western political scholars.

J.S Mills wrote that "The greatest dependency of the Crown, India, is, by general admission, not capable of administering its own affairs by a representative system. This, however, does not diminish, but increases, the mischief and danger of its administration by the unchecked power of a Cabinet Minister. There is far more danger in India than in any Colony, of the ignorant or corrupt misuse of Ministerial power, because India is less understood than any Colony, because its people are less capable of making their voice heard, and because it is more difficult for Parliament to interfere in its administration with adequate knowledge, than in the affairs of any other Colony."

Winston Churchill also criticized Indian leaders as he said "Power will go to the hands of rascals, rogues, freebooters; all Indian leaders will be of low caliber & men of straw. They will have sweet tongues and silly hearts. They will fight amongst themselves for power and India will be lost in political squabbles."

Conducting elections in a vast country was a big challenge for election authorities. The election of 1951-1952 was the biggest success for Indian democratic values. The first general election proved that India has democratic ethos. Indian exceptionalism damaged the perception built by J.S Mills and Winston Churchill.

The industrial revolution created a middle class and in the Indian context, this middle class acted as firing agents for spreading democratic values in the heart of common citizens. Democracy recognizes revolution but it never accepted violence. Indian mass movement was not violent till the Quit India movement in 1942. Gandhi's ahimsa was the biggest source for India to remain democratic. The differences between the thoughts of Gandhi and Ambedkar also gave shape to Indian Democracy. Ambedkar was inspired from Thucydides. He quoted the thought of Thucydides who said that "It may be your interest to be our masters, but how can it be ours to be your slaves?" while Gandhi's inspiration was different from Ambedkar. He inspired from Tolstoy by his book, "The Kingdom of God is within you"; and Ruskin by his "Unto This Last". Besides these three personalities, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and the Gita and the Bible were lifelong sources of inspiration for Gandhi. He proposed that power should be in the hands of Villages in terms of Sabha or Panchayat. He experienced that villages were the soul of India, and a strong soul is a base for the stronger body, but Ambedkar opposed the idea and Ambedkar supported that cities would be the future of India where people live without the caste identity. According to Ambedkar in cities, people would be merged-mixed, and discrimination could be minimized in the system of urban societies.

However, both leaders wanted to give power to the people. They were aware about the fact that keeping power in the hand of the people would make Indian democracy vibrant. People in India are lived with a variation of thoughts, and the constitution of India has the power to make these thoughts identical but not exclusive. In our preamble, 'We the People of India' connected ourselves with a fair system of democracy in which we elect our representative to make laws for us in a manner which maximizes the development of all irrespective of caste, race, sex, ethnicity, and place of birth. Indian democracy is the aspiration of development and growth of all by all. Indian constitution frames the democratic and political code for common Indians and for their leaders.

India does not follow a unitary form of government it follows a federal form of government. Which is known as Cooperative-federalism or Marble cake-federalism. "Marble cake federalism" is a bakery metaphor often used to describe the model of cooperative federalism. This model of federalism holds that the local, state, and national governments do not act in separate spheres, but instead have interrelated policy goals and administrative duties."

Independent Judiciary also makes Indian democracy stronger. India never witnessed the dictatorship of the Judiciary. The check and balance system also helped in stabilizing democratic values in the executive, legislative, and Judiciary.

Democracy could not be understood as famous personality in the world of Politics as people felt pride when they meet with their famous superstar's same feelings also arise when a country said their command is meeting people's demands and they are also following the norms of democracy. Taking a selfie with a famous superstar and maintaining a tag of democracy are two situations in which the first is for internal happiness and sometimes also for showing off on social media but democracy is only for happiness not for showing off. The real benefit of Democracy is that it provides a dignified life to all those who respect democratic values.

1st Amendment act 1951 proposed a big bag of 9th schedule through which exceptions could be managed. This bag was beyond the power of judicial review. But the judiciary of India in the cases such as Waman Rao vs Union of India 1981, IR Coelho vs state of Tamil Nadu 2007 etc. protected the interest of common citizens and put the 9th schedule under the limit of Judicial review. (after 1973 all laws of 9th schedule would come under Judicial review).

Indian democracy possesses structural features like multi-party elections, an independent judiciary, and free media. State-sponsored media was dominated till the 1991 economic reform in India. After the LPG [Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization] reform, a lot of private players came into existence which strengthened the Indian democracy. New sources of knowledge enhanced people's participation in democratic processes. Television and Radio played an important role in making Indian democracy stronger. Prime Minister Narendra Modi mentioned at the Democratic summit "democracy is not only the people, by the people for the people but also with the people, within the people." Media has the power to connect with the masses; it also acts as enabler of democracy and giving freedom to media is an important factor which would decide the legitimacy of Indian democracy in a global stage.

The emergency which was imposed during the period of Indira Gandhi became a dark spot in the vibrant democracy of the country. During the period of emergency power of Indian democracy was witnessed by everyone in the form of the JP [Jaiprakash Narayan] movement. One of the most powerful leaders of India Indira Gandhi lost an election in 1977. The election resulted in heavy defeat for the Indian National Congress. Rai Bareilly seat in which Indira Gandhi never defeated she lost her seat because of the emergency, and which shows the world, power of citizens is more than any strong leader, and Indian citizen would not tolerate authoritarian behavior from leaders. Later she accepted defeat and announced, "My colleagues and I accept the people's verdict unreservedly and in a spirit of humility." Indian democracy is a story of praise and punishment. It gives prize to those who worked according to universally accepted democratic principle, and it gives heavy punishment to all defaulters in different forms. Indian democracy is also influenced by technology. Technology is a game changer it impacts Indian democracy both in positive and negative way. In this book, we will travel a long journey, and we will find how technology transforms democracy in India. The domain of the state is the domain of politics, and technology is continuously changing the nature of politics, it is expanding the domain of the state and making the phrase 'digital is politics' a reality. Mobile, telephone, internet, chips, computers, websites, fin-tech, crypto, live streaming, social media, EVM, Direct benefit transfer, VVPAT etc. are transforming Indian Democracy.

Indian democratic values which originated with Vedas and remain in the soul of citizens of India for centuries are transforming through technology. The voting pattern, election and advertisement, Government Institutions, Indian Judiciary, and Parliament, all are impacted by the rise of technology in Politics and Governance.

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