

CHANGING FACE OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA - ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

"Democracy is a government of the people, for the people, and by the people."

Abraham Lincoln

Democracy means rule by the people to ensure that every citizen takes part in the decision making process either directly or indirectly through elected representatives. India is the largest democracy in the world. The notion of democracy is built on the premise that all citizens of a State are equal and that the nation offers an opportunity to all members of the society to participate in the process of self-governance. Democracy, considered by most to be the best way to govern a nation, succeeds only when a full cross section of society takes part in the process in equal measure. This in turn should lead to the common person's participation in the political process of the nation as a normal pattern. In India—the world's largest democracy by population—this two-step process is still falling short with participation of the general public after the completion of the electoral process being negligible and restricted to the elite few. The poorer sections of society are deprived of a voice and do not take part in the governance process till the next democratic elections. In other words, the democratic success of the nation is not shared by all.

Key Words: *Democracy, India, Analysis, Trends, Party System.*

Introduction:

Since becoming independent from British rule, India has practised democracy, and over the past 70 years, has also adapted the concept to create a uniquely Indian model. The democratic process as practised in India has its advantages and also its share of challenges that make it cumbersome and less than optimal in a number of instances. Ever since the first elections held in 1952, there is no doubt that there has been multi-fold increase in the level of political awareness in the country as a whole. This is a positive move forward in a nation where a large part of the population are still uneducated and live a hand-to-mouth existence. Paradoxically, simultaneous to the increase in political awareness, there is also the increase in the misuse of the electoral system by political parties and politicians to achieve narrow and parochial objectives. Over a period of a few decades the political parties have willingly compromised on values, ethics and morality in order to gain power through the electoral process, laying aside the imperatives of broader national interest. The responsibilities towards the nation at large that should sit heavily on the elected members of parliament does not merit a mention in the priorities of most of the politicians.

Further, the politicians have also been responsible for the use of unaccounted money and the criminalization of politics; and they have promoted and entrenched casteism and communalism within the society, which has led to deep rooted religious and sectarian divide within the nation. In the Indian practice of democracy, value-based politics the mainstay for the well-being of any nation, has been squandered and sacrificed at the altar of power worship. The quest for power has subsumed all altruistic purposes and initiatives.

large support base that it had enjoyed gradually fell away. The government was voted out of power at the next elections. The average person is intolerant of open corruption in high places that does not seem to have any accountability.

The criminalization of politics and the readily visible nexus between politicians and criminals is another aspect that diminishes the status and stature of the parliament. Over the years, many criminals have been elected to parliament and the political class has not initiated any constitutional amendments to remedy this lacuna. Criminals participating in the electoral process and winning seats in the parliament directly questions the legitimacy and veracity of the process. Correcting this anomaly is a major challenge to 'cleaning up' politics and one that should be taken up on priority. However, the criminal-politician nexus makes it difficult for an incumbent government to undertake such an initiative.

Conclusion:

Finally it can be concluded that it is very sad that our democracy after 70 years of independence has given us some challenges. Although political awareness is improving in India, the middle-class remains strangely apathetic to the electoral process, not considering voting as a priority civic duty. There is a visible trend towards cynicism regarding the political process, a belief that nothing will change. In a recent interview, the US Secretary for Defence and former US Marine General James Mattis stated that the biggest threat to a nation emanates from the people's cynicism towards the system that in turn creates spiritual and personal alienation of the people from the community and the government. Since the middle-class also form the most educated segment of society, this attitude can completely distort the election results and create far-reaching impact on the political process. This distortion affects all aspects of the developmental process of the nation further creating glaring areas of discrepancy in the overall development model.

In a mature democracy, elections are contested on issues of national importance and challenges that people face on a daily basis, underpinned by the requirements to ensure the economic stability and prosperity of the nation. In the Indian context, both these factors are only of peripheral interest and the elections are almost always contested on narrow and sectarian issues. This bias has led to India not yet having developed a broadly accepted national identity of its own that can be embraced by people across the entire country. In a cyclical manner, the same drawback of the lack of a recognisable national identity contributes to regional issues being considered more important than national challenges—a self-perpetuating cycle emerges. Extrapolating this situation to the tactical level of politics it can be seen that in the Indian context there are far too many divisive forces in play at the regional, State and local level on a day-to-day basis. They directly influence the electoral and political processes, impinging on the correct practice of democracy. Overcoming such forces is a difficult climb up a mountain of partisan, communal and sectarian opposition.

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