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Democracy in India: A historical perspective

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Abstract
The idea of democracy in India came from west. Greek has been regarded the originator of the original concept of democracy. India has democratized the idea of democracy in actual practice apart from the diversity and cultural ambiguity being present in this country. In modern India people still believes in democracy which is based on the assumption that every individual should have a part in making decisions, democratic actions lies in the control and direction of everyone and every individual must need democratic atmosphere to manage life with others. Thus, the modern India is a departure from imperialism to sovereign independent India, where dynamic institutional structure is being framed significantly within constitutional supremacy. In modern democratic India, there is a fundamental shift that the nature of democracy could neither be problematic but is moving toward the zone of dictatorship. Thus, it can be said that the democracy is in trouble in some of the most mature democracies of the world. Presently the democracy in India has lost its form. The undemocratic ruler and dictators are trying to interpret the concept of democracy in their own words. They made it most confused theory in India. So, in this paper an attempt has been made to define and discuss the concept of democracy before visualizing the prevailing democracy in the context of India. It also looks at the characteristics and features of democracy. It explores that how India exercised democracy tremendously and how universally democratized the concept of democracy. At the end, it will intend to discuss nature of democracy practicing in contemporary India. This paper is mainly based on secondary sources like News Paper, magazine, journals, books etc.

Keywords: India, democracy, successful, system, form of government

Introductions
Since the existence of the universe, the question to answer, who should rule? Has been perhaps universally accepted and in response that 'people should govern' too accepted. In distinguished civilizations the different set up like authoritarian, aristocratic, autocratic, monarchic, oligarchic, feudalism etc. has become the mechanism to govern the masses. Although, the tradition of democracy in politics has been traced date back to ancient Greek. The term 'Democracy' was also rooted and derived from ancient Greek word 'Kratos' which means 'power' or 'rule' and 'Demos' stand for 'the people' or 'the many' thus democracy therefore means 'rule by people' or 'rule by many'. In other words, we can state that democracy is basically a form of government in which people shall either directly or through their periodic elected representatives, controls the political system. Thus, in this sense it can be said that in a democratic republican country like India the real power vested in the hands of common people [1].

Throughout the recorded history, democracy has remained always the most admired and venerated form of political system of the world. When the world has been considering the authoritarianism as the guiding ideology and the power to mobilize the population to achieve national goals and interests, simultaneously that resulted the preparing of soil to establish the roots of democracy on the other hand. Therefore, authoritarianism has been replaced by democracy which flourished the prevailing social conditions. Democracy had a beginning with excellent objectives which were labelled with peace, harmony, development, freedom from injustice, equality and just society. However, when we talked about the characteristics of democracy which are adult franchise, impartial judiciary, representative government, freedom of press, fair electoral practices, two or more political parties and supremacy of constitution it emanates and made people to think that we are within such a system where democracy is actually present and works accordingly. This observation entails by such practices that democracy is purely a political notion. But the democracy is not just a political notion, it is a broader concept and having a broader meaning.

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Democracy: A Broader concept
In its broader sense an English economic historian Richard Henry Tawney writes in his own words that Democracy is "…*not only a form of government but a type of society and a manner of life which is in harmony with that type*". So, from this sense the democracy is not merely a notion for practical politics but it is also a dominating mechanism in every walk of life. Democratic morality, democratic thinking and democratic behaviour of every individual should not be separated from this normative aspect of democracy.

Democracy: A narrow concept
In ancient Greek civilization the understanding of democracy was merely a political system. During the 17th and 18th centuries, democracy was primarily concerned with ideal notions. In present world mainly after the Second World War democracy is free from ideals and values. In other words, it has been emphasized by many scholars that the aspect of democracy is purely political [2].

In this regard several eminent scholars like John Austin, James Bryce, A.V. Dicey, John Seely, and A.L. Lowell are from those expounders of democracy who have treated the concept of democracy is mainly a form of government [3].
However, the tradition of democracy can be traced from ancient Greek but it was not taken until 19th century by political thinkers. Now it seems that all forces like liberals, communists, anarchists, conservatives, socialists, and even fascists have been eagerly proclaiming the virtues of democracy [4].

Defining democracy
Herodotus of Halicarnassus, defined democracy as that "*form of government in which the supreme power of the state is vested in the hands of the community as a whole".*
Ancient Greek philosopher Cleon had defined democracy 2400 years ago as*, "That shall be democratic, which shall be of the people, by the people and for the people."* In modern period this definition was revived by Abraham Lincoln as "*it is a government of the people, by the people and for the people".*
James Bryce has defined, *"democracy is that form of government in which the ruling power of state is legally vested, not in any particular class or classes but in the members of the community as a whole".*
Mazzini writes, *"Democracy is the government of the best and wisest, for the progress of all and through all."*
Seeley has given a precise definition as, *"democracy is a government in which everybody has a share".*
Among the definitions of democracy, we can state that people are the chief source of state power. It is a government of majority but in this form of government interests of minorities are not too ignored [5]. Democracy has been defined variously by different scholars. It is described as a form of society, state and government.
As a form of society democracy is defined in which all citizens are socially equal, regardless of their material riches or social standing. It believes in equal rights, freedom of expression, fair trail, and toleration of minorities is also taken care. Democracy as a form of state, defined that every sector of the population is represented equally in the legislature through election based on adult franchise. However, democracy as a form of government, determined that people participate in government either directly or

indirectly through elected representatives. Wikipedia offers a definition of democracy that "*Democracy is a system of government by which political sovereignty is retained by the people and exercised directly by citizens or through their elected representatives*" [6].

The pillars of democracy
- Sovereignty of the people.
- Government based upon consent of the governed.
- Majority rule.
- Minority rights.
- Guarantee of fundamental human rights.
- Free and fair elections.
- Equality before law.
- Procedure established by law.
- Constitutional limits on government.
- Social, economic, and political pluralism.
- Values of tolerance, pragmatism, cooperation, and compromise [7].

Concept of democracy and its evolution in Indian context
Democracy in modern India being developed and introduced by the British government. Sumit Sarkar (2001) stated that the democracy begins in India not in a way to the real "democratic sense", of the British English man, or English educated Indian but for the firm necessity of the Indian Council Act of 1861 which for the first time has given the recognition to the rights of the peoples of India representing their legislative bodies. The Indian Councils Act 1909 (famously known as Morley-Minto reforms) has increased the size of all legislative councils that gave legal recognition to the elective principle and has provided for the non-official majorities and extended the powers of the councils by granting them a power to move and vote on the resolutions particularly on the matters of public urgent including the budget. Further, the Act of 1919 (famously known as Montagu-Chelmsford reform) introduced certain features of democracy like criticizing the policies and activities of government, restoration of public administrative system. Finally, the government of India Act of 1935 was that one significant milestone in the growth and progress of democracy in the country. It established almost every features of democracy in the country. It has introduced several significant features like transfer of all departments of provincial government to the responsible ministers in the administration, the idea of diarchy has been valued and prepared to introduce at the union level instead of provincial level, ministers have been given to the charge of administration for all the subjects (Roy, 2018) [8]. It can be safely said that the idea and concept of democracy was not unfamiliar and weird to India in its pre-independence period. Because, in British India and even before the Britishers arrival in India the democracy and the democratic institutions were existed. As Atul Kohli (2001) argued that a close study of ancient Indian transcripts is essential to realize the roots of democracy in this country [9]. The Arthashastra of Kautilya have mentioned about the concept of welfare state. The ancient Indian great philosopher and statesman argued that the king ought to derive his happiness from the happiness of the people. He believes in the welfare and wellbeing in all spheres [10]. It clearly indicates that the Indian origin concept of democracy is also resemblance as of Greek. The Greek were also of the view that democracy

is regarding the wellbeing of the people. Similarly, the Indian origin concept of democracy also entails that the real and true sense of democracy is attributed for the wellbeing and empowerment of masses.

Democracy: An efficacious democratizing experiment of India

When the longest written constitution of the world was framed on 26th of January, 1950 the institutions of democracy were ushered in, in India. Champions of democracy were unanimously stated that the idea may become failure in practicing democracy in a country where literacy rate as per census 1951 was not more than 18.33 percent. Like illiteracy the poverty was also on its peak. Different scholars and analysts were in doubt that the experiment of democracy in India can never reach its success by keeping in mind some factors like poverty, illiteracy, cultural diversity, linguistic diversity, and religious diversity in such a pluralistic society. But this country has made the millennium frame of democracy which has not been implemented and exercised in any country of the world. In this connection the most recent example of Yugoslavian disintegration in small parts can be appear. After twenty-five years, all states of Yugoslavia are formally democratic nations because they fail to democratize the idea of democracy but India has done it successfully [11]. So, India truly democratized and universalized the idea of democracy and therefore making it possible to practice in conditions of deprivation and disadvantages.

Seventy years of independence have gone actually in making people's faith and belief towards democracy in India. No doubt, democracy is an article of faith and belief upon democratic institutions of this country. But the so called democratic institutions are far away from ensuring equality and comfort to everyone. India fail to remove poverty and inequality. According to a World Bank report *"India is by far the country with the largest number of people living under the international USD 1.90-a-day poverty line, more than 2.5 times as many as the 86 million in Nigeria, which has the second-largest population of the poor worldwide"* [12]. In the light of above mentioned World Bank report we can say that we are living in such a country where two classes of people are likely to exist and what the Gaetano Mosca a political scientist had asserted *"...two classes of people appear- a class that rules and a class that is ruled"* he added that the ruling class performs all political functions and enjoys all the advantages that power brings [13]. In this sense the present political scenario of our country is not distinguishable. In fact, it cannot be said that a defunct system is applicable in this country but the irony is that the ruling class holds most of the wealth as well as power. Thus, under the auspices of democracy in this country the richest classes are fulfilling their private hobbies and the last person of this country which also belongs to the democracy is still far away from comfort zone. Democracy is not for the interest of wealthy individual, it is for common good and it must exist in the minds of ordinary people. Democracy can be an attribute to remove ugliest disparities and worst inequalities existing in every society. But it only happens in the hands of democratic leaders. In the words of Robert Michels, *"leadership is a necessary phenomenon in every form of social life"* [14] (Varma, 2015, 148). Generally, throughout history, it has been familiar that the difference

between success and failure, whether in war or business, in a protest movement or in a game, can be attributed chiefly to leadership. Although we have leaders, what we are missing or expected to be absent from our largest democracy of the world is democratic leadership. Therefore, leaders are policymakers and decision-makers, so it is essential for a democratic system to have mature, courageous, and self-sacrificing leadership. As earlier said, democracy is an article of faith and values it must exist in everyone's mind. A large section of people in this country are living in poverty and deprivation but they still believe in democracy. They take part in elections and vote for change, but despite all their active involvements, their aspirations still need to be reviewed for a practical shape.

Democratic government is always intended to be transparent, responsive and accountable government. To bring transparency, Right to Information (RTI) is an indispensable condition for the success of transparency and democracy and good governance. The RTI Act came into force in India on 21 June, 2005 but there are also a number of cases where the public organizations have not been responded to the request to several information due to the ineffective implementation of the act. [15] There are glaring injustices and distortions due to inequalities. In present democratic system there is an absence of justice for poorer and weaker section of society. In this way minority rights are violated but in Democracy minority rights are essential and not meant to be ignored, what Franklin Roosevelt reminded us *"no democracy can long survive which does not accept as fundamental to its very existence the recognition of the rights of minorities"* [16].

Another challenging issue to the very essence of democracy is corruption in our country. According to Corruption Perceptions Index 2016, India has been ranked 79 among 176 countries. In 2017, India ranked 81 in corruption perception Index among the group of 180 countries. In the Asia Pacific region, India has signaled out as one of the worst offenders in the Corruption Perception Index 2017. However, in 2018, India ranked 78 among 180 countries. Despite consistent and unswerving efforts from the government to fight corruption, it has been revealed that no little progress has been made in this account which can be a breach in exercising the concept of democracy [17].

According to Jose Ugaz, a member of Transparency International Board in 2014 stated that *"In too many countries, people are deprived of their most basic needs and go to bed hungry every night because of corruption, while the powerful and corrupt enjoy lavish lifestyles with impunity"*. The condition in India is not much different. Corruption is a cause of serious concern for the people of India. The reason for corruption in India has been briefed by Transparency International that *"state's inability to effectively deal with petty corruption as well as large-scale corruption scandals"* [18]. Hence it can be said that "Democracy is a show of the rich, for the rich and, of course, by the rich".

In the present democratic set-up, the government claims that it is committed toward secularism and non-discrimination but it is only a level of rhetoric and the reality is something different. Secularism in India means equal treatment to all religions but the ruling party BJP promotes Hindu nationalism. Hindu nationalism has now become *"cultural nationalism"*, a pro-Hindu stand is now referred as *"true*

secularism", and anti-Muslim stand is now camouflaged as "*emphasis on internal security*" [19].

An American-based international non-governmental organization "Human rights watch", outlined India in these words that "*the Indian government has escalated pressure on civil society groups critical of its policies, using harassment, intimidation, and restrictions on foreign funding. Free speech has come under attack from both the state and interest groups, and critics of the government often face charges of sedition and criminal defamation and are labeled "anti-national." Authorities have failed to address attacks against religious minorities by vigilante groups. Caste-affected communities continue to suffer discrimination*" [20]. Hence it can be truly observed that the democracy in India is too dense towards the zone of dictatorship. So, we can only hope that sooner or later in this country a genuine democratic government which will be free from all social, political and economic evils, will prevail to flourish democracy.

Conclusion

Democracy is the best form of government because it works for the welfare of the people. In a democratic form of government, all citizens are equally treated before the rule of law and no one can claim to be superior over one and others. In a democratic system of government, all eligible citizens equally participate directly or indirectly. In a democracy all people are qualified to express their views clearly and freely. A common notion of democracy could be as it is superior to all forms of government because at least it can select the best and wisest person to govern. The current leadership in a perfect democracy has the least influence in our country. Still, in no way it can never be said after seventy years of a long experiment that we are under an imperfect form of government. A democratic form of government is more flexible and thus more successful. Democracy offers the best hopes for progress and peace.

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