Prismatic Horizons
Journal of Social Science and Humanities
www.phjssh.lexarcheus.com
Vol-01, Issue-03 (Jul-Sep, 2023)



A study of the Impact of India's Political System on the Dynamics of Democracy

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received	15th July, 2023
Revised	29th July, 2023
Accepted	1st , August, 2023
Available Online	4th , August, 2023

ARTICLE ID
PHJSSH0103001

KEYWORDS

Democracy, Problems, Challenges, India, Accountability, Transparency

ABSTRACT

Democracy, a form of governance, involves the participation of the populace in decision-making, either directly or indirectly through representation via free and regular elections. India's democracy is widely recognized as the largest on a global scale. Within a democratic framework, the authority and power reside with citizens or their chosen representatives, irrespective of the governing structure. Nonetheless, contemporary India faces numerous challenges to its democratic system, including disparities in social and economic spheres, unemployment, poverty, casteism, illiteracy, corruption, communalism, terrorism, and population growth. Addressing these challenges is imperative for India to maintain its status as a genuine parliamentary democracy. The study aims to delve into the existing democratic system within India and assess the influence of the Indian political setup on democracy. Furthermore, it suggests viable measures or adjustments that could enhance the resilience and durability of India's democratic system.

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INTRODUCTION

How can we make sense of the growing contradictions within our democracy? On one hand, there's intense political competition where party elites secure significant victories in assembly elections, accompanied by a active populace demonstrating on the streets. These dynamics coexist with the intellectual power structure of the BJP. Alternatively, how do we reconcile the fact that while many political groups in India are experiencing organizational decay and centralizing tendencies, they still play a crucial role in producing democratic outcomes, such as representing minority groups?

The Indian democratic system is a unique amalgamation. It emerges from both deliberate institutional design and unintentional consequences of conflicting societal forces. Political parties in India serve as a platform for these societal influences, exhibiting a mixed track record of success in some areas and failures in others. Their adaptability and versatility have preserved the vibrancy of typical politics.

The recycling of political ideas and the entrepreneurial spirit of India's leaders serve as safeguards, preventing any particular national discourse from achieving dominance. Furthermore, the rich cultural and moral diversity in India ensures that no single electoral majority remains permanent, and no intellectual supremacy retains lasting authority. The diverse nature of India continues to foster competing tendencies, thereby upholding the democratic balance within our system through ongoing change. Democracy rests on the pillars of representative governance, public involvement in political processes, freedom, and transparency in political activities. It's reasonable for political scientists to consider a robust civil society as a key component of democracy. This perspective is sound because democracy creates an environment that encourages the growth of civil society organizations and their members. Thus, while citizen engagement in the political process is pivotal for democracy, it also serves as the foundation for a thriving civil society.

Scope of Study

The scope of this research article encompasses a comprehensive analysis of the political system in India and its impact on the functioning of democracy. The study aims to examine various aspects of India's political landscape, including institutional structures, citizen participation, civil society dynamics, and historical contexts. By investigating both positive and negative aspects, the research will provide a nuanced understanding of how the Indian political system influences democratic principles and practices.

Statement of Problem

The study aims to investigate the impact of India's political system on the functioning of democracy, specifically exploring whether the current political framework is conducive to democratic principles or if it poses challenges that hinder the effective realization of democratic ideals. The study seeks to uncover the ways in which the political system in India either fosters or undermines the essential elements of democracy, shedding light on its potential benefits or detriments to the democratic process.

Methodology

The study encompasses both descriptive and analytical characteristics, extensively utilizing secondary data obtained from reliable sources like books, websites, and newspaper articles, alongside numerous international journals and periodicals that stem from research and comparable

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studies, ultimately leading to a balanced and reasoned conclusion. The research has also employed primary techniques such as direct observation and expert interviews to gather information.

DISCUSSION AND RESULT

Indian Political System

The governing framework in India draws inspiration from the Westminster model of governance observed in the United Kingdom. This structure comprises a head of state known as the president, an executive arm led by the prime minister, a legislative body consisting of a parliament comprising both an upper house (Rajya Sabha) and a lower house (Lok Sabha), and a judicial branch headed by the supreme court.

Regular general elections are held every five years, employing the initial voting system, with 543 available seats in the Lok Sabha. Indirect elections for state representatives in the Rajya Sabha occur in staggered six-year cycles, resulting in around one-third of the chamber's seats being contested every two years. State legislatures determine these seats.

The Constitution of India outlines the nation's political system, its federal structure, and governmental powers. It also safeguards the rights of Indian citizens, including equality before the law and freedoms such as expression, assembly, and movement.

India's caste system is a hierarchical social construct that divides the Hindu majority into distinct groups, with 'Brahmins' occupying the top and 'Dalits' positioned at the bottom. This social hierarchy adds intricacy to the system. Often, one's surname can indicate their caste. Despite constitutional prohibition of caste discrimination and the establishment of quotas for more equitable employment and educational opportunities in the early administrations, caste remains a potent factor in Indian politics. Some regions witness political parties targeting voters based on their castes and castes frequently vote collectively.

Democracy in India

India stands as the largest democracy globally. On January 26, 1950, its Constitution transformed it into a secular and democratic nation. The democratic values of India embrace equality, justice, liberty, and fraternity. All strata of society, regardless of caste, creed, gender, or region, can participate and elect their representatives. Modeled after the British system, India operates a parliamentary system with both central and state governments. While the parliament supervises the central government, state legislatures oversee state governments. Both the central and state governments are chosen through democratic processes and adhere to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha frameworks. The President and Head of State are elected by both the central and state governments.

The evolution of Indian democracy is apparent. This transformation is marked by structural shifts in political competition, the significant growth of the middle class, widespread social media usage, and the decline of traditional hierarchies. Since 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has expanded its influence across social and geographical fronts, weakening the Congress party, dismantling the Left Front, and diminishing state-level parties. The BJP's broad successes have narrowed the scope of voting groups and other socio-economic divisions. State-level dynamics that once held prominence for two decades are now less significant in election assessments, particularly at the national level.

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In a democratic country, citizens choose and elect representatives to lead them. Democracy is defined as "government of the people, by the people, and for the people," placing individuals at the forefront and emphasizing freedom of choice. The term "democracy" originates from the Greek word "dēmokratía," translating to "government of the people." On a global scale, there exist two types of democracies: direct democracy, where qualified individuals engage directly in political decision-making, and representative democracy, sometimes termed a democratic republic. Are a society and its system truly democratic when political and socio-economic aspirations are met? This division includes political factors that can lead to political democracy, as well as societal and economic conditions that foster societal democracy. Political conditions necessitate a people-driven Constitution, ensuring fundamental human rights and universal adult franchise for electing representatives. Democratic principles and societal progress should encompass social security, welfare, and equitable status. The benefits of economic progress should reach the underprivileged.
To ensure the continued effective functioning of democracy in India, several vital suggestions should be considered:

Recognize that the voter is at democracy's core. Political awareness needs to be disseminated among the populace, ensuring people are aware of their rights and responsibilities. Workshops, seminars, and conferences should be conducted at the grassroots level to educate individuals about their entitlements and advantages.

Education is vital for illiterate individuals to make informed voting choices, as ignorance poses a threat to democracy. Political education and information dissemination can rectify this issue in India.

Collaboration between government and NGO institutions is essential for fostering national economic and social progress.

The media, the fourth pillar of democracy, should actively champion truth and democratic values. Media independence is crucial for uncovering the truth in India's governance.

The conduct of politicians significantly impacts democracy. They should adopt a democratic mindset, viewing themselves as servants rather than masters. Their focus should be on public service and national enhancement, campaigning on issues rather than divisive factors like caste, religion, or communal politics. The restoration and refinement of democracy should be their priority for seamless operation.

Ethical leadership is paramount. Citizens should choose leaders based on character and behavior, with leaders prioritizing public interest and fair service. Young people should emulate these ethical leaders, ensuring that ethics and democracy go hand in hand.

The Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) in Part IV should hold justiciable status akin to the basic rights in Part III. DPSP should actively promote India's economic and social development.

The three pillars of democracy—the legislature, executive, and judiciary—should collectively address national concerns. These institutions must uphold democracy and adapt to the changing circumstances of the nation.

Positive and Negative Effect of the Indian Political System on Democracy

India, as the world's most populous democracy, naturally sees widespread support for democratic governance. However, alternative forms of government also find traction in the country. Around 79% of Indians express contentment with their current democratic state, with 33%

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indicating strong satisfaction. Notably, a higher percentage of BJP supporters (84%) than Congress followers (65%) express contentment with Indian democracy. The state of Indian democracy appears to mirror public perceptions of the economy. Those who perceive favorable economic conditions in India are more likely to view the country's democracy positively. Likewise, those who believe that future generations will experience improved financial prospects tend to be more satisfied with democracy compared to those pessimistic about the prospects.

Both direct and representative democracy find acceptance among the populace. A significant majority of Indians (75%) consider a representative democracy, where elected representatives legislate, as an effective governing method. A similar proportion believes that direct citizen participation in voting on crucial national matters and legislation is preferable over decisions made solely by elected leaders. Despite never having a nationwide referendum in its seven decades of independence, India has conducted state-level votes. Roughly two-thirds of Indians favor governance by experts rather than elected politicians, based on what's best for the nation. Interestingly, India is among the seven countries out of the 38 surveyed where over 60% of the population supports technocratic governance. In terms of government styles, 55% of Indians lean towards a form of governance led by a strong leader without intervention from legislative or judicial bodies, while 53% express a preference for military control. India demonstrates more support for authoritative authority compared to other surveyed nations, indicating that it's one of the four countries where more than half the population favors military rule.

However, India's democracy has struggled to achieve the consistent economic growth witnessed by countries like China over the past four decades. This remains a significant challenge, alongside the persistence of severe poverty. The disparity between the affluent intellectual elite in globalized cities like Delhi and Mumbai and the impoverished residents is stark. Many young Indians, particularly in densely populated regions like Uttar Pradesh, continue to engage in low-wage, low-skilled occupations, leading to a disenchanted voter base. This resentment has fueled Indian nationalism and populism, often targeting religious minorities—primarily Muslims and Dalits—while promoting Hindu pride.

The ruling BJP, led by Prime Minister Modi, aligns with the century-old Hindu nationalist ideology, Hindutva. The party seeks to unite the Hindu community and address historical caste divisions, emphasizing that these divisions were exacerbated during the colonial era. While the BJP appears less concerned about indigenous faiths like Sikhism and Jainism, it maintains a more adversarial stance towards religions originating abroad, particularly Islam and Christianity. The BJP argues that its policies uplift Hindus and contrasts itself with previous parties that allegedly favored the Muslim minority.

In recent years, the situation in regions like Kashmir and Assam has raised concerns about civil liberties and minority rights. The abrogation of autonomy in Kashmir, communication lockdowns, and detentions of separatist leaders has sparked debates. Assam's citizenship issues have led to the exclusion of 1.9 million Muslims from the National Register of Citizens. These developments, alongside economic challenges and divisive political debates, have impacted Indian institutions and democratic principle. The demographic imbalances persist due to selective abortions, resulting in skewed male-female ratios. Although India's working-age population presents a demographic dividend, unemployment rates have reached a 40-year high, posing employment challenges.

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Notably, population growth has been more rapid in the northern states, where education levels are comparatively lower, contributing to the complexity of India's issues.

Lastly, the presence of criminal records among political candidates presents an additional hurdle to democracy. In the 2019 general election, 43% of elected parliamentarians had a history of criminal charges.

Challenges to Democracy in India

The challenges facing the democratic system of governance are on the rise and require overcoming. The democratic process encounters a range of significant hurdles, a few of which are enumerated here.

One peril to democracy emerges from the infiltration of criminal elements into politics, a phenomenon known as political criminalization. Criminals often enter political parties and legislative bodies through elections, exploiting criminal tactics to manipulate the political landscape. This infiltration of lawbreakers into the ranks of lawmakers poses a threat to democracy, potentially leading to societal and democratic breakdown. Instances of collaboration between various Indian political parties and criminal syndicates to gain power or financial gains have eroded democratic principles. A case in point is the election of Janata Party MPs with criminal backgrounds in Bihar in 1997, illustrating the impact on contemporary Indian democracy.

Casteism also stands as a formidable challenge to the proper functioning of Indian democracy. The caste system prevailing in India has unique characteristics. Democratic processes have seen the emergence of caste-based politics, voting patterns, and even conflicts rooted in caste affiliations. This system affects individuals' essential liberties for personal growth, which form the cornerstone of democracy. The presence of the caste hierarchy in Indian society reverberates through the social and political dimensions of democracy.

Illiteracy serves as a hindrance to democracy, as lack of knowledge about governmental operations impedes effective democratic engagement. In India, illiteracy and democracy are incompatible, as the rule of law and equality are crucial pillars for democratic governance. Informed decision-making and the selection of capable leaders are hampered by ignorance and illiteracy. This scenario results in weak democratic institutions within uninformed or illiterate communities, unable to foster a vibrant democracy.

Terrorism is another challenge confronting democracy, with its destructive impact on democratic systems and innocent lives. Terrorism distorts public discourse, marginalizes moderates, empowers political extremists, and polarizes society, particularly evident in democratic nations like India. Terrorism hampers both national and global progress, requiring governments, international bodies, and civil society to mitigate its political ramifications. India, including instances like the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, the 2008 assault on the Taj Hotel, and the attacks in Pathankot (2016) and Pulwama (2019), has endured the grip of terrorism, which threatens its democratic foundation.

Political corruption further impedes the effective operation of democracy, eroding its foundational principles, efficient governance, and government legitimacy. Political leaders exploit their positions for personal financial gain, undermining the ethical fabric of the nation. In a country like India, corruption directly impacts politics, government functionality, and institutional integrity. The corrupt decision-making process erodes the rule of law within the judiciary, accountability in

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policymaking, and effective public service delivery. The economy of the nation can also suffer as a consequence of corruption.

Conflicting Interests and Financial Support

The author wants to make it clear that there are no financial interests or personal associations that might influence the substance of this paper. The research did not receive any financial backing from any institution or entity.

Acknowledgments

The completion of this article is a result of the dedicated work and steadfast dedication of numerous individuals, all of whom we acknowledge with gratitude. We also extend our thanks to researchers and authors who have previously delved into related topics, as their past contributions have provided a solid foundation for our unanticipated and fruitful investigation, ultimately contributing to a smooth and successful completion of this manuscript.

CONCLUSION

Scholars have derived various conclusions through an examination of political participation within the context of democracy and the study of political involvement in India. Firstly, a clear connection exists between the political system and the extent of public engagement in political affairs. The nature of an institution, whether initially democratic, undergoing reform, or utilizing democratic elements within an authoritarian framework, is less significant than its inherent institutional structure. In the Indian model, civil society possesses substantial influence, and political involvement is well-developed and notably efficient. Despite civil society's strong organization, citizens lack a comprehensive array of opportunities to impact the political process. Furthermore, individuals engage in political activities when the political institutions enable such participation, and they abstain when these institutions prioritize representation over active engagement. It's essential to acknowledge that political engagement hinges on individual beliefs, their acceptance of the responsibility to participate, and their prior political experiences. In India, people operate under the assumption that they have the liberty to express their opinions due to the robust democratic traditions present. While political engagement at the supranational level is relatively new, individuals face ambiguity and uncertainty regarding how to contribute effectively under these novel circumstances. Essentially, individuals haven't had adequate chances to partake, which hinder their grasp of the significance of the participation process. The aspect depends not only on the type of governmental structure and historical context that have influenced people's thinking over time but also on a crucial facet: personal understanding of one's role and purpose within the political process. This encompasses genuine interest in participation, lack of interest, and alignment with the life philosophy of advocating for one's rights and opinions. In conclusion, it's essential to emphasize that an individual's inclination to engage in the political process surpasses the mere right outlined in the Constitution.

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