

OBSTACLES TO PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

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Abstract

These people do not feel themselves participative in the parliamentary democratic process. In India we keep on debating these various aspects of parliamentary democracy and its achievements and challenges. For a better understanding of the same, we discuss this in this paper. We are proud to be the largest democracy in the world. For more than sixty eighty years we have witnessed the conduct of successful elections, peaceful changes of government at the Centre and in the States, people exercising freedom of expression, movement and religion. At the same time we, quite often, listen complains about prevalent inequalities, injustice or non-fulfillment of expectations of certain sections of the society.

Keywords:- Proud, democracy, government, centre, expression.

Introduction:

The heterogeneous composition of India acts as a major hindrance to the democratic working of the Parliamentary System. Even there are obstacles in the form of high prevalence of illiteracy, poverty, regionalism, communalism, Lack of transparency in the governmental structure and Judicial delays have made the smooth functioning of parliamentary democracy complex. India may best describe as Representative Parliamentary Democracy. It epitomizes the “Sovereign Will” of the people of India. However, there co-exist major obstacles in the smooth working of the Parliamentary democracy in India.

Meaning of Parliamentary Democracy:

This means that our political system is based on the idea that Parliament is **supreme**, or **sovereign**. A parliamentary democracy is one in which the people choose **representatives** at **regular elections**. These representatives are responsible for a number of functions:

1. the formation of the government. This is achieved by majority vote in the **lower house**.
2. the passage of legislation (the laws of the nation) by majority vote of the Parliament.
3. the scrutiny and monitoring of the executive government, the public service and other authorities and institutions created by Parliament.

OBJECTIVES

1. Identify major problems and challenges being faced by Indian parliamentary democracy;
2. Recognize the corrective measures for improving the Indian parliamentary democratic system;
3. Explain the roles of citizens in making an efficient and successful democracy.

Methodology:

The methodology of the study would be Historical, Analytical and Experimental.

The Major Obstacles:

The challenges come both from prevailing domestic and international conditions as well as lack of adequate prerequisites for a smooth functioning of democracy. These are discussed below.

1. Illiteracy:

Illiteracy among people was a matter of grave concern for the successful functioning of the parliamentary democracy in India on the eve of independence and it still continues to be a major challenge. The literacy rate in 1951 was mere 18.33 per cent and female literacy was negligible with 8.9 percent. Literacy enables citizens to be aware of various issues, problems, demands, and interests in the country..

2. Poverty:

It is generally said that for a hungry person right to vote does not have any meaning. For him/her the first requirement is food. Therefore, poverty is considered as the greatest bane of parliamentary democracy. It is, in fact, the root cause of all kinds of deprivations and inequalities. Even now a considerable proportion of Indian population lives below poverty line, called 'BPL'.

3. Gender Discrimination:

Discrimination against girls and women exists in every walk of life. But we know that gender equality is one of the basic principles of parliamentary democracy. But the discrimination against females continues to be a fact of life. It is clearly reflected in the sex ratio, child sex ratio and maternal mortality rate. The number of females in comparison to males has been declining ever since 1901. In 1901, the sex ratio was 972 females per 1000 males. It came down to 927 females per 1000 males in 1991. According to 2011 Census it is 940 females per 1000 males which is still very unfavorable to females.

4. Casteism:

The most detrimental and inhuman aspect of the caste system is the practice of untouchability which is continuing in spite of the constitutional ban imposed on it. This has led to segregation of so called low castes or 'Dalits', depriving them of education and other social benefits. Casteism has played a negative role even in the democratic political processes. In fact caste system acts against the roots of parliamentary democracy.

5. Communalism:

Communalism and religious fundamentalism have acquired very dangerous form and alarming proportion in India. It is subversive of our democratic political stability and destroyer of our glorious heritage of humanism and composite culture. It is opposed to secularism and even humanism. In recent past also, communalism has proved to be a great threat to our social and political life on several occasions.

6. Religious Fundamentalism:

Religious fundamentalism also reinforces communalists in exploiting both religion and politics. In fact, fundamentalism acts as an ideology which advocates a return to orthodoxy and a strict compliance to the fundamental tenets of religion. Religious fundamentalists vehemently oppose progressive reforms in order to establish their exclusive control on their respective communities.

7. Regionalism:

Indian parliamentary democracy has also been struggling with regionalism which is primarily an outcome of regional disparities and imbalances in development. This situation has led to regionalism manifested in demands for creation of new States, autonomy or more powers to States or even secession from the country. It is true that regionalism and sub-regionalism are unavoidable in a vast and plural country like India. The problem begins when these interests are politicized and regional movements are promoted for ulterior political motives. Such unhealthy regional or sub-regional patriotism is cancerous and disruptive.

8. Corruption:

Corruption in public life has been a major concern in India. In 2011, India was ranked 95th of 183 countries defined as corrupt in Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index* (CPI). In fact, corruption is rampant in all walks of life, be it land and property, health, education, commerce and industry, agriculture, transport, police, armed forces, even religious institutions or so-called places of spiritual pursuits. Corruption continues to exist in covert and overt ways at all three levels - political, bureaucratic and corporate sector. The tentacles of corruption have affected all organs of government, including the judiciary. Above all, corruption in electoral processes and bribing of voters who participate in elections at different levels has now become a common practice.

9. Criminalization of Politics:

In recent years, criminalization of politics in India has become a debatable issue. Politicians indulge in violence and take refuge in other unhealthy, undemocratic methods to win elections.

10. Legislatures

There is deep concern at the decline in the quality of parliamentary debate, disorder and chaos in sessions, the perfunctory scrutiny of legislative proposals and the inability to monitor the functioning of the executive.

11. Political Violence:

In India we have been witnessing various forms of violence. Communal violence, caste violence and political violence in general have attained serious proportion. Communal riots are engineered by vested interests for political, religious and economic reasons. Caste violence in various shapes has been increasing. Despite agricultural development, abolition of *zamindari system*, and developments like green revolution and white revolution, there are still powerful feudal elements in the society. During elections, violence is being adopted either to mobilize voters or to prevent them from exercising their right to vote. Moreover, violence has been associated with demands for separate States, reorganization of States or adjustment of State boundaries. Violence has also been used quite frequently during industrial strikes, farmers' movements, and students' agitations.

CORRECTIVE MEASURES:

It is thus clear that democracy in India faces certain serious challenges. These are causes of serious concern to all. Certain significant corrective measures that have been adopted and can be initiated are as follows:

1. Universal Literacy:

The significance and necessity of education for efficient functioning of parliamentary democracy. Various governments at national and state levels have been making efforts to attain this goal. As a follow up of the National Policy on Education 1986, a National Literacy Mission was set up in 1988 (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) currently a nation-wide programme known as *Saakshar Bharat* is being implemented. Further, the Parliament of India in 2009 passed the *Right to Education Act* through which education has become a fundamental right for all children of age group 6-14 years.

2. Poverty Alleviation:

From the 1970s, a number of programmes have been implemented for alleviation of poverty in India. In 1999, Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) was emphasis on organizing the rural poor into self-help groups (SHGs). Similarly, the Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY) is a programme for the creation of rural economic infrastructure with employment generation as a secondary objective. The Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) is being implemented to enhance the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

3. Elimination of Gender Discrimination:

It is now being recognized that the goals of democracy “of the people, for the people and by the people” cannot be fully realized if the female population are not included in all ways in the processes of socio-economic and political development. Some other ideas include: (i) creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential; (ii) equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation; (iii) equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office, etc.; (iv) strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women; and (v) elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child.

4. Removal of regional Imbalances;

Redressing regional imbalances has indeed been a vital objective of the planning process in India. Efforts are on to reduce regional disparities. Some of the major programmes are: (i) the Tribal Development Programme, (ii) the Hill Area Development Programme, (iii) the Border Area Development Programme, (iv) the Western Ghat Development Programme, (v) the Drought Prone Area Programme and (vi) the Desert Development Programme. For the development of North-East states, a certain percentage is earmarked from the budget for each developmental scheme or programme in the region.

5. Good Governance:

The dangers of political instability are greatly exaggerated in recent times. Therefore certain proposals to impose stability seem to be both infeasible and undesirable. If a government does not enjoy the confidence of the legislature, and if no new government can be formed, it will only lead to a lame duck government with no capacity to legislate or obtain budget approval. The demands of good governance and also tools of direct democracy and expressions of popular sovereignty like initiative, recall and referendum should be adopted at the local government level.

6. Administrative Reforms:

The success of all the above stated corrective measures primarily depends on the efficient functioning of administration. Rampant corruption, inefficiencies, wastages and irresponsiveness to the needs of citizens are some of the commonly acknowledged problems afflicting the administration.

7. Judicial Reforms:

Judicial reform also has been a critical concern since long. Various recommendations have been made on many occasions. The major issues that need consideration in this regard are : (a) Simplification of Rules and Procedures, (b) Repealing Out-dated Laws, (c) Increase in the Judge Population Ratio, (d) Time-bound filling of Vacant Posts in Judiciary, (d) Transparency in Appointment, Promotion and Transfer of Judges, (e) Judicial Accountability; and (f) Transparency of Court Proceedings.

8. Sustainable Development:

Indian democracy can adequately respond to all the challenges when it moves forward on the path of sustainable development. **Sustainable development** is a pattern of using resources that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for future generations to come. The term was used by the Brundtland

Commission (1987) which coined what has become the most often-quoted definition of sustainable development as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

9. Effective Functioning of Legislatures

There is deep concern at the decline in the quality of parliamentary debate, disorder and chaos in sessions, the perfunctory scrutiny of legislative proposals and the inability to monitor the functioning of the executive. Remedial steps are required to make legislatures effective in their legislative and watchdog functions. 1) The committee system should be strengthened by giving powers and exclusive authority to initiate legislative proposals or scrutinise government bills, effectively monitor executive decisions and implementation and investigate into wrongdoing. 2) Reforms should be initiated to make the conduct of the sessions more purposive, time-bound and productive. 3) Steps should be taken to enhance the dignity of, and confidence in, the legislatures and promote ethical conduct and professional discharge of functions. To improve the functioning of the Parliament the following issues need to be addressed. (a) Quality of debates and discussion on the floor of Parliament need to be improved. (b) Absenteeism among members which has assumed alarming proportions needs to be checked if we are not to make a mockery of our Parliamentary democracy. (c) The increasing indiscipline and unruly behaviour of Members and the increasing tendency to disrupt the House and stall Parliamentary proceedings has got to be checked. It amounts to paralyzing the activity of governance and legislation. (d) “More time is to be devoted to Lawmaking and make the committee system more effective to better oversee the Government’s functions—”. (e) “A strict code of conduct for people’s representatives, implementing the policy of ‘No work, No pay’, if Parliament session was disturbed by members devoting most of the time in quality debate and discussions and disqualifying the tainted MPs are some of the urgent measures which should be implemented. That would definitely make the Parliamentary Democracy more useful and meaningful”..

ROLE OF CITIZENS IN A PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

In fact, a democracy can be successful and vibrant only when citizens imbibe and reflect in their mindset, thinking and behaviour the basic values like equality, freedom, secularism, social justice, accountability and respect for all. They have to appreciate the opportunities for their desired roles and play proactive roles to actualize the goals of democracy.

Major opportunities for roles of citizens may be as follows:

1.Participation

The key role of citizens in a democracy is to participate in public life. The most commonly observed opportunity of participation is exercising the right to vote during elections. And in order to vote wisely it is necessary that each citizen listen to and knows the views of different parties and candidates, and then makes his or her own decision on whom to vote for.

2.Making the System Accountable

Participation in the political process is not enough. Citizens have to make the democratic system responsive and responsible. Citizens have an obligation to become informed about public issues, to watch carefully how their political leaders and representatives use their powers, and to express their own opinions and interests. When citizens find that the government is not living up to its promises; they can point it out through media, make recommendations and demands for accountability from the government. If the government still fails to fulfill promises, citizens may protest, carry out peaceful satyagraha, civil disobedience or non-cooperation campaigns to make the government accountable.

Conclusion :

Our Constitution gave us a Parliamentary democratic system of governance. The recent emergence of a pro-active civil society and its movement against corruption, which has brought in the people's power to the forefront has further strengthened and deepened our democracy. Some well-meaning critics have advocated a switch-over from our Parliamentary democracy to the U.S. Presidential system as a remedy to the malady of Governmental instability in the system of Coalition Governments which has become an inescapable reality in India more particularly since 1989 when no political party has been able to secure an absolute majority. However, it is also true that in spite of the Coalition Governments, we have till date experienced a good deal of political stability. It has been rightly said that 'our experience of instability in Government is not sufficient reason to discard the Parliamentary system'. Whatever problems our Parliamentary democracy is facing today could of course be improved—may it be the instability syndrome, criminalization of politics or even Parliament being forcibly made dysfunctional through disruption, confrontation or forced adjournments. For this, two things are needed (a) necessary reforms to be undertaken within the existing Parliamentary system and (b) men of character and integrity in the political system. As has been rightly said by

Rajendra Prasad : "If the people who are elected are capable and men of character and integrity they would be able to make the best even of a defective Constitution. If they are lacking in these, the Constitution can not help the country. After all a Constitution like a machine is a

lifeless thing. It acquires life because of men who control it and operate it and India needs to-day nothing more than a set of honest men who will have the interest of the country before them.

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