India a Shining of Democracy Around the World: The Democratic Beacon

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Abstract

Democracy is simply more than just a system of government. It is said to be a particular kind of state, a social structure, and a moral and religious principle. Democracy therefore implies trust in the average person. It is thought to be responsive to each of its members. PM Narendra Modi paid respect to a wide range of independence warriors during his tenth consecutive address to the nation from the Red Fort ramparts. The Prime Minister declared, "India is the mother of democracy, and diversity is its strength". India has gained the moniker "the mother of democracy" because of its rich history, culture, and diversity. This enormous subcontinent has hosted a variety of civilizations, rulers, and ideologies over the course of millennia, establishing a distinctive heritage of governance that served as the basis for its democratic values.

India: The Mother of Democracy is a book that was just published by the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR). Corporate Life in Ancient India was first published by R.C. Majumdar in 1919, and a revised and expanded edition followed in 1969. D.D. Kosambi's Introduction (1956), which underlines the democratic structure and group decision-making in what he thought to be tribal institutions in the age of the Buddha, also addresses the topic of an ancient Indian democracy. The ICHR has proposed subjects including Democratic Thoughts and Traditions as Reflected in Arthasastra, Janatantra, 'Existence of Ganarajya in Kalinga During Asoka's Invasion', Harappans-the Pioneering Architect of the Democratic System in the World: Archaeological Perspective, 'Governing Principles of Democracy in Ancient Sanskrit Scripture based on Sruti, Smiti Itihasa and Mahakavya text' (Guha, 2023).

Introduction

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Democracy focused historians frequently stress that it must be understood in the context of the distinctive western history of political growth, which dates back to the Greeks. Many times, the spread of democratic principles and practises to other cultures-or their failure to do so-has been attributed to the perception that these concepts are alien to non-Western cultures. The separation of Church and State, or secularism, is rightfully celebrated as a Western tradition. In India, secularism has a long history. It is not a product of the West. "Ekam sat, viprah bahuda vadanti"- "Truth is one, the sages call it by various names"- is a statement made in the Vedas. India has a history of embracing communities of religious minorities.

Even though the institution of monarchy was well-established among the early Aryans, it had various limitations and was not absolute. In many ways, certain democratic features restrained the king's total power. These were the Assemblies of the people, the oath the monarch was required to swear at his coronation, and the voice of the people in choosing their king. It was the final institution to significantly contribute to limiting the king's power. Democracy must succeed in order to be successful in cultural terms. India has a long history of dialogue, debate, and cultural diversity. These elements support democracy. These characteristics offer some assurance that democratic institutions in India have a more solid foundation.

Most academic discussions begin with the inescapable assumption that the concept of democracy was first developed in ancient Greece. However, the Rig Veda understood the same fundamental ideas underlying contemporary democracy long before Greek culture. This demonstrates how debates in the Sabha and Samiti were once settled and resolved by all parties involved. Even those with differing ideas were divided up into distinct groups and forced to come to an mutual understanding after discussion.

Democracy in Ancient India

Democracy is a system that is governed by or for the people. As a result, it is a system in which the people elect their own representatives or rulers. It follows a pattern where the fundamental values are liberty, equality, and fraternity. The Vedic era marks the beginning of India's democratic system of government. It wouldn't be incorrect to suggest that the Vedas are where the concept of democracy first appeared. Both the Rig Veda and the Atharva Veda make reference to the Sabha and Samiti. Democratic ideas and values were elevated to a deity in the Rig Veda and given the name 'Samjnana'. This phrase refers to the general consciousness of the populace. The Rigvedic hymns addressed to Samjnana urged the populace to congregate in their assembly. Following the Vedic Period, it is possible to find descriptions of minor Republics where citizens collaborate to make administrative decisions. In ancient India, the Republic was referred to as a democratic regime. Diverse historical evidence may be found in the Atreya Brahmins, Ashtadhyayi of Panini, Mahabharata inscriptions, Ashoka pillars, historical writings of modern historians, Buddhist and Jain scholars, and the Manusmriti.

- **Rigveda: Sabha and Samiti**

Since the beginning of Indian history, the panchayati raj system has served as the centre of a civilised democracy in that country. The Rigveda, Manusamhita, Upanishads, Jatakas, Satapath Brahman, and other ancient holy scriptures make frequent references to auto local management. In those days, the village was regarded as the fundamental unit of government and it had total autonomy, just like in today's democratic decentralisation (Maji, 2015). The terms 'rajan', which is the Rig Vedic equivalent of 'king', and 'samrat', 'emperors', are frequently used throughout the text. Forms of village self-government are recorded in the Rig Vedas, the earliest Hindu literature, which date to around 1200 B.C. The names 'Sabha', 'Samiti', and 'Viditha' were used for village assemblies throughout the Vedic era (Sharma, 1996). The Rig Veda removes any doubt that the monarch had a position of prominence that was purposefully distinct from the rest of the populace in every possible way, and was no longer just the head of a primitive tribe. The sabha and samiti, two assemblies, were a fundamental part of the ancient Indian government (Apte, 1996).

Sabha refers to both 'the people in conclave' and the 'hall' where they convened. The Samithi was a larger gathering that included not just Brahmanas and wealthy benefactors but also members of the general public. Thus, it would seem that the Samiti was an important gathering of a larger number of people for the conduct of tribal or political affairs, and the monarch served as its chairman. The Sabha, on the other hand, was a more elite group than the Samiti and had a more political orientation. Together, these two bodies served as beneficial checks on the king's authority (Balasubramanian, 2005). Sabha refers to both, the people in conclave and the hall, where they convened. The Samithi was a larger gathering that included not just Brahmanas and wealthy benefactors but also members of the general public. Thus, it would seem that the Samiti was an important gathering of a larger number of people for the conduct of tribal (or political) affairs, and the monarch served as its chairman. The Sabha, on the other hand, was a more elite group than the Samiti and had a more political orientation. Together, these two bodies served as beneficial checks on the king's authority (Ghosal, 1997).

- **Mahabharata**

The Mahabharata provides a number of further insights into the ideal behaviour and qualities of a king (all of which might be appropriately applied to the current business chief executive). The care the king should have for his subjects and the respect and heed that he should pay to his counsellors-who should of course be beyond blemish-stand out far and ahead of the comprehensive listings of these traits. Manu specifies seven or eight ministers, although Bhishma claimed in the Mahabharata that there may be anywhere from three to eight ministers. There are a number of requirements that must be met, including being modest, truthful, respectful to authority figures, capable, quiet, steady, well-off, brave, grateful, content, knowledgeable, learned, polite, and upright. It is also useful to mention another idea pertaining to the king's councillors before abandoning the topic of vedic and puranic injunctions. There are numerous allusions to an organisation known as the Parishad. It refers to a gathering of experts debating philosophical issues in the Upanishads. The Parishad is referred to as the king's advising body in judicial and perhaps administrative matters in the Dharma Sastras. It typically had at least ten members who were all well-educated, capable of sound thinking, and free from covetousness (Sen, 1995).

- **Mauryan Empire**

The Maurya Empire was able to sustain security and political unanimity across a considerable portion of western and southern Asia by using a meticulously planned bureaucratic organisation. The Maurya Empire

was established by Chandragupta Maurya, who ruled from 324 until 297 BCE. Four provinces made up the Mauryan Empire, with Pataliputra serving as the imperial capital. Tosali in the east, Ujjain in the west, Suvarnagiri in the south, and Taxila in the north were the four provincial capitals of the Mauryan Empire. The administrative apparatus was strengthened by King Ashoka (304-232 BC), who also laid the structural cornerstones of contemporary public administration. Justice, local governance, and welfare were all changed by him. Ashoka separated the ancient administrative divisions of the empire into provinces or districts. These provinces were further split into Janapadas, which were then divided into villages, and Aharas or Vishyas, or subdivisions. The administration's numerous officials who were appointed to carry out the administrative duties and the social initiatives had clearly defined job descriptions. During the Gupta era (AD 300-600), when practically all governmental functions-aside from setting foreign policy and declaring war-were carried out by local authorities, the idea of decentralisation gained additional traction (Sabharwal & Berman, 2010).

The emperor and his Mantriparishad, or Council of Ministers, served as the founding members of the organisational system at the imperial level. The Mahamatyas, who served as the equivalent of regional prime ministers, assisted the Kumara, or royal prince, who served as the head of the provincial government and represented the monarch in charge of the provinces. The empire controlled all facets of government at every level, from local sanitation to international trade, through its complex structure of bureaucracy. Even clearer is Kautilya: "One wheel alone does not move; a king can reign only with the aid of others". Kautilya is very adamant on the need for the king and his advisors to work together (Rangarajan, 1987). Whether the endeavour is a success or a failure, future trouble is guaranteed if the king and his advisors cannot agree on the path of action. There is no stronger recommendation applicable to contemporary corporate governance arrangements for executive managements to heed the guidance provided by the independent non-executive board members.

Democracy in Medieval India

Mediaeval India saw the blending of various cultures and ideologies, which aided in the development of its democratic spirit. The central government strengthened and the role of the central bureaucracy increased in mediaeval India. The federal government took over police responsibilities and limited the village council's ability to maintain law and order. In particular when it came to tax collection and maintaining the peace, the authority of the council was reduced and that of the headman was expanded. The villages and cities were excluded from democratic government, which was implemented in an archaic style (Nayak, 2016).

The universal love and equality that Sufi saints and Bhakti poets advocated for broke down societal barriers and developed a democratic ethos. A rich inheritance from the Islamic world was used in the writing of history in mediaeval India. Modern historians of the Delhi Sultanate produced a wide range of history, including didactic history, general histories of the Islamic world, literary eulogies of the sultans, and panegyrical profiles of their benefactors (Jauhri, 1988). India underwent both upheaval and progress during the period of the Delhi Sultanate's creation. Temples, palaces, and entire cities were destroyed during the first phase, which was characterised by widespread mortality and loss of many sacred and exquisite cultural artefacts. This was more of an ongoing process that took place during the Delhi Sultanate's expansion and consolidation as well as its development and peaceful coexistence. Although the two cultures were already in contact before Islam came in India, communication accelerated when it

did. Although these cultures coexisted for a very long time, there was no actual fusion between them, yet the influence of each on the others cannot be understated (Kumari, 2019).

- **Sufism**

Sufism started to spread across the Indian subcontinent like a net that was continuously expanded by tying additional knots. Sufi shaikhs were tied to their khalifas like knots, and these in turn were tied to their khalifas, resulting in the development of more and more khanqahs as centres of spiritual learning. During the Delhi Sultanate's reign, the Sufi mystic traditions were more readily apparent. Hindu communities had drawn inspiration from saintly personalities and fantastic tales. The cosmopolitan cultures of Bahadad and Persia had a significant impact on mediaeval North Indian society. The Sufi intellectualism in India was accelerated by the Ghaznavi and Ghorid Courts. Northern India saw a strong consolidation of the Sufi brotherhood throughout the thirteenth century A.D (Schimmel, 1975).

Ulamas and Sufi Mystics were among the religious elite of mediaeval India who respected other religious traditions. They had interacted with the underprivileged and shared their faith by offering community services. In North India, there were several Sufi Saints who lived exceedingly revered and pious lives. It suggested a love for all people (Anuzsiya, 2016). In India, sufism was warmly welcomed. These Sufis' spiritual teachings sparked a revolution in Indian civilization.

- **Kabir Das**

In a genuine sense, Saint Kabir Das, an Indian saint and well-known poet-prophet, was the dictator of language, gaining notoriety just through the impact of his straightforward yet profoundly beautiful poetry. Kabir was a poet who typified the collective spirit. The deeply thought-provoking lines, which were interwoven with diverse points of view, helped to enhance knowledge of Indian society, its culture, faiths, customs, rituals, and other realities. Kabir's writings are pertinent because they provoke thought on issues like social injustice, economic inequality, religious diversity, and mental enslavement, among other things. This encourages us to further consider the meaning of our mortal existence. In order to create a society that internalised the principles of oneness, purity of heart, peace, critical enquiry, self-knowledge, and love for all, Kabir's poetry harmonised all faiths and beliefs by highlighting 'the best that was thought and said'. He steadfastly argued in favour of reconstructing spiritual experience in order to create societal harmony. The most recurrent themes in Kabir's poetry were his democratic tone and temperament. During the mediaeval era, which is generally seen as spanning from the seventh to the eighteenth-century AD, Kabir stood out as a towering figure among the saint poets of the Bhakti religion. Kabir's 'democratic socialism' and his lifelong dedication to fusing many facets of society into an organic whole must be taken into consideration when analysing his writings (Dwivedi, 2021).

- **Local Self-Government**

Governing oneself locally the logic of democratisation, the welfare of society, and good governance all depend on institutions. Regardless of whether a country is unitary or federal, decentralisation is a fundamental theme of governance and a key component of the reform agenda in many. However, in India, these institutions are as old as Indian civilization and were self-developed there. Throughout history, they have gone through numerous alterations. Indian civilization has endured the occasionally overwhelming political inundation because of the lengthy history of local government in the nation.

In his book Indica, Meghasthenes, the ambassador whom the Greek Emperor Selecus dispatched to the Court of the Mauryan Emperor, discusses the boards in charge of running Pataliputra, the capital city of the Mauryan emperors. He claims that there are six bodies of five each that are in charge of the city. Local governments continued to have a wide range of powers during the Gupta era without interference from the national government. In the Gupta era, the administrative council of the city was an elected body that was modelled after that of local communities, however some topics were reserved for the supervision of imperial officials. The village headman and the village council thus played crucial roles at the local level in ancient India. The headman often had a prominent position, was accorded a certain dignity, and was regarded as the king's representative. He was in charge of administration and tax administration. The village government was handled by the village council, which was common in ancient Southern India (Nayak, 2016).

There are references to a hamlet and a district from the Mauryan and Gupta eras, respectively. The settlement never lost its significance from the Buddhist through the Gupta eras. These organisations evolve into panchayats over time. These panchayats served as effective local government entities in practically every village. The executive and judicial powers of panchayats were extensive. They consult, oversee, and, if necessary, intervene (Yadav, 2022).

- **Mughals**

Local institutions suffered a setback with the advent of Muslim rule in India since they no longer had the same autonomy and dignity as they had under Hindu rulers. The Mughal Empire was an autocrat with a strong centralization. Being primarily urban residents, the Mughals were primarily engaged in urban governance. There were distinct wards in each town, and a certain brotherhood typically lived in each ward. Every ward or Mohalla had a Mir Mohalla who served as the representative of the people. An officer by the name of Kotwal was given control of a town and served in a variety of municipal capacities as well as having ultimate power over matters pertaining to the judiciary, police, and finances. Thus, the ancient autonomy of Local Governments was largely absorbed by the drive of centralization throughout the Mughal era. Any form of democratic government in the local communities was abhorred by the Mughal Emperors due to their very nature and governing style (Nayak, 2016).

While casteism and the feudalistic system of government that existed under Mughal rule during the mediaeval era gradually undermined rural self-government. Between the sovereign and the populace, a new class of zamindars, feudal chiefs and tax collectors, emerged. The collapse and stagnation of village self-government thereafter started. Under the British, these village bodies suffered a setback and nearly vanished in their original form, restricting their jurisdiction to the settlement's social life (Yadav, 2022).

Democracy in British Period

The original institutions of local self-government in India were completely eliminated as a result of the conquest of the region and the excessive centralization of administration during the early British rule. However, the 1857 events opened the British ruler's eyes and softened them, and in the years that followed, many measures were taken to promote decentralisation and usher in local administration in both urban and rural areas. In 1800, the British government made its first attempt to establish local self-governance. However, the panchayat lost its independence during the British era. The competition provided by the British Courts of Justice, for instance, has rendered the conventional caste panchayat ineffectual (Yadav, 2022).

Samuel Laing, a member of the Viceroy's Council, suggested that some taxes should be imposed and collected by local rather than imperial officials in 1861. Additionally, he noted that it would eventually result in local government institutions in India (Venkatarangaiya & Pattabhiram, 1969). The next step was made by Lord Mayo's Resolution, which was passed in 1870 and resulted in the acceptance of local self-government in both urban and rural areas. The resolution promoted the widespread use of the election concept with the stated goal of fostering self-government (Nayak, 2016). The Lord Mayo Resolution provided the necessary push for the growth of neighbourhood institutions. It was a turning point in the way colonial policies towards local government developed. The Local Government was established by Mayo's resolution largely to further British interests rather than to support autonomous authorities in this nation. However, Lord Rippon's famous resolution on local self-government from May 1882, which focused on towns and called for local bodies with a large majority of elected non-official members and a non-official chairperson, can be considered the real benchmark of the government's decentralisation policy. The renowned Lord Rippon resolution from 1882 was the first to emphasise the administrative function's educational component (Yadav, 2022). The numbers of elected members and presidents of municipal organisations attest to the initial success of the changes proposed by Lord Ripon to revitalise local government. But a conservative, paternalistic administration that was devoted to the worship of efficiency later hindered these. Additionally, Lord Curzon, Lord Ripon's successor, believed the reforms were too extreme to be put into practise (Nayak, 2016).

Under the direction of Sir H.W. Primrose, the Royal Commission on Decentralisation recognised the value of panchayats at the village level. The development of panchayats in India was highlighted by the provincial autonomy granted by the Government of India act of 1935. However, the system of accountable local government was the least accountable. A hierarchical administrative structure based on monitoring and control developed despite the efforts of numerous bodies, including the Royal Commission on Decentralisation, the Montague and Chemsford Report on Constitutional Reform -1919, the Government of India Resolution-1919, etc. Under the direction of Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian National Congress organised activities for independence from the 1920s to 1947, emphasising the topic of all-India Swaraj (Yadav, 2022).

Democracy in Independent India

Decentralised local administration is the best guarantee for any democracy's success, so practise it and put it into action. The best political democracies are those whose roots are firmly established in the living, dynamic soil of local self-government. Following independence, there was a growing understanding that decentralisation was essential to achieving the people's aspirations for democracy. The nation's decision-makers are beginning to understand the necessity of a centralised policy for the nation's overall development. In 1950, India enacted a democratic constitution. Panchayats were not included in the constitution of India's first draught. The Constituent Assembly attracted attention by kicking off discussion and debate both inside and outside the Constituent Assembly, which ultimately resulted in the approval of a proposed amendment. The amended article, known as Article 40, states that the State shall create village Panchayats and grant them the necessary authority and powers to function as self-governing bodies Majumdar & Kataria, 2000).

The Indian Constitution grants the State Government authority over municipal corporations, improvement trusts, district boards, mining settlement authorities, and other local authorities for the administration of local self-government or village affairs. It was anticipated that local bodies would be utilised more and

more as vehicles of national policy in the new system that would emerge after independence (Nayak, 2016). The self-government system known as panchayati raj attracted a lot of media interest after independence. Notably, the organisation, philosophy, and strategy were developed by many committees. The recommendations of the Balvantray Mehta Committee in 1957 were a significant advancement towards the creation of local bodies in Independent India. To ensure community involvement and the Community Development Program's success, it suggested a three-tier local government structure (GOI, 1957). The Ashok Mehta Committee was established in 1977 to conduct an investigation and offer appropriate recommendations. The Committee identified three stages of the Panchayati Raj system in India: ascendancy (1959–1964), stagnation (1965–1969), and decline (1969–1977). Panchayati Raj was proposed for inclusion in the Constitution by the Committee. The Planning Commission's GVK Rao Committee examined several facets of Panchayati Raj Institutions in 1985. It was also of the opinion that PRIs needed to be activated and given the necessary support in order to become efficient organisations for resolving people's issues. The L. M. Singhvi Committee, established by the Department of Rural Development, Government of India, recommended in 1986 that the Panchayati Raj Institutions be given constitutional status. The Singhvi Committee's proposal to grant constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj Institutions was not supported by the Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State Relations (1988), which held that uniformity across India is necessary (Nayak, 2016).

Conclusion

India has a history of democracy, in order to develop its practise of democracy now, it must apply its ideals, which are derived from history and culture. Good governance was a topic that interested the ancient Indian philosophers more on a practical level than a theoretical one. They didn't engage in pure speculation in either ethics or politics. They discussed the well-being of all beings (praja), as well as the cosmos, but they lacked a coherent conception of the state and of administration. In a free election system, the people's representatives exercise absolute power on their behalf. This is the background for the phrase 'government of the people'. Democracy is choosing a leader, having that leader exercise their power responsibly, and having the people exercise control over that leader.

Indian society has long been accustomed to democratic forms of government. In any case, the general public's connection to the current iteration of Indian democracy stems solely from its historical sense of unity with democracy. Comparing India to other countries that gained independence from the colonial powers after the Second World War, the speed of institutionalising democratic government has also been unusually rapid. The powerful Indian Constitution, freedom of the press, the independence of the judiciary, the federal system, the division of powers, constitutional supremacy, etc. have all significantly bolstered Indian democracy.

The birthplace of democracy, India, has developed through centuries of struggles and victories, forming its distinct democratic history. The country has consistently worked to uphold the ideas of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity, from the early republics to the contemporary constitutional democracy. India must preserve its democratic heritage as it develops, while also adjusting to modern challenges and maintaining an inclusive, lively, and engaged society for future generations.

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