

Democratic system and good governance in Indian perspective

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Abstract

Modern democratic system is the most appropriate system from the point of view of good governance. With reference to western democracies, it may be opined that they are very near the models of good governance, but in developing countries like India they are still far from the goal of good governance. Indian democratic structure of governance, which is the largest democracy of the world, achieved good level during the last six and half decades. People have got the right to participate in governance directly as well as indirectly, To make this goal more practicable, what steps are required at the administration level so that objective of good governance can be achieved.

The objective of the paper is to ascertain as to the extent in which decentralization process has been realized to achieve the goal of good governance. In this perspective the hypothetical question is whether an effective administrative system is necessary for maximum participation of the common people.

□ Democratic system with some modification may help cure the problem of good governance?

□ Non-Governmental Organizations and Community Based Organizations can play effective role for the realization of good governance?

The above hypothetical questions have been examined in the Indian context. Indian democracy has been running successfully for the last 65 years continuously in the multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-ethnic society. In this context it has been observed that if decentralization process would take place properly the goal of good governance could be achieved which would help in achieving a good quality of life of the citizens in the country. The results of the study will help to achieve the goal of good governance in other countries especially in Asian perspective.

Key words: *Participation, Democratic system, Good governance, India*

Introduction

Democracy is universally accepted as the best form of the government. It is a very old concept and has existed in the world since ancient times in various

forms. In its traditional forms, it was known as an elected government directly or indirectly with the basic features of adult franchise, liberty, equality and property, justice-civil, political, social and economic, rule of law, independent judiciary, freedom of press, freedom of speech, expression and association, political and civil society organization etc. But modern democracy with all these characteristics also includes participation, responsiveness, accountability, decentralization, effectiveness and transparency attributes, in other words, these may be called basic features of good governance. The success of democracy primarily depends on the modern attributes of democracy which are mentioned above. These attributes makes democracy more democratic and effective to fulfill the expectations of the people. The dignity of the individual or the sacredness of human personality is the fundamental principle of democracy. It is for the state to look to the well-being of all classes without any distinction of caste, creed, colour etc. The right of the individual to privacy and self-development is one of the cherished rights of democracy. People participate directly or indirectly in the decision making process at every level and also have the right to oppose the government if it goes beyond the interests of the common people.

Democracy as is generally understood is the government of the people, the government by the people of the country, a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly. The executive and legislative power is being vested in elected representative of the people. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the concept of democracy has undergone considerable change. Democracy no longer consists of people merely exercising their franchise periodically to choose by whom and how they would be governed. Democracy is not only a form of government but also a holistic concept covering social, psychological, cultural and attitudinal aspects with others. The success of democracy depends upon the structural, procedural and attitudinal attributes and more particularly the spirit of democracy is inculcated only through the democratic values and culture of the people to the grass root level. Democracy is a continuous process of government, a way of life, an attitude and a state of mind.

Democracy as a Way of Life

In its broader sense, it means faith in man. A genuine is an active, growing and progressive force responsive to the will of the people. Its aim is mutual service and public welfare. Democracy is a way of life in the sense that it is based on the dignity of human personality. It means a society in which men have equal opportunities for developing the faculties in them and in turn contributing their due share to the welfare of the society. Such a society is called democratic society. In such a society criticism of all kinds are tolerated and encouraged.

Democratic society provides training in discipline, love sympathy, co-operation and benevolence. In a democratic society, individual is an indispensable part of the society like the organ of human body. Dewey has aptly remarked that “democracy is nearest to the social organization in which individual and society have organic relation.”¹

Democracy as a Form of Government

Democracy as a form of government means that all adult citizens have the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs. Modern democracy is representative, which means; the government is run by the elected representatives. Democracy is a government of the people. The main characteristics of modern democracy are universal adult franchise, elective legislature, civil liberties and party system.

Democracy as a Form of Society and Economy

Democracy in its broader sense does not merely mean a political system in which people rule; rather it is associated with socio economic ideals. Tawney rightly pointed out that democracy is unstable as a political system, as long as it remains a political system, but it is also a type of society, and a manner of life which is in harmony with the type.² It is required for the multi-dimensional development of the human personality. Rousseau, J. S. Mill, Green, Lindsay, Barker and Laski emphasized this developmental aspect of democracy. The broader meaning of democracy is normative and in this sense democracy is an ideal, it is a form of state and society, and economy, it is an end itself rather than a means to an end. The doctrines of popular sovereignty and natural rights of man have been the core of democracy. There is supremacy of the will of the people. The government which is run either by the people directly or by duly elected, representatives is responsible to the people. The ruler should act for the interest and welfare of the people.³ David Held defends democracy on the ground that it achieves one or more of the following fundamental values or goals: equality, liberty, moral self-development, the common interests, social utility, the satisfaction of wants and efficient decisions.⁴ The emphasis in all democratic theories has been on the development of the personality of every human being, human dignity, the recognition of fact that every individual has the right to life and right to achieve the purposes he/she freely determines. This fact gives to democracy its humanness and makes human being as it centre of gravity.

Index of Democracy

The **Economist**⁵ has examined in a study the state of democracy in 167 countries and rated the nations with an Economist Intelligence Unit Index of Democracy which focused on five general categories; free and fair election process, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture. Sweden scored a total of 9.88 on the scale of ten which was the highest result, North Korea scored the lowest with 1.03.

Full democracies

(Scores of 8-10) 1. Sweden, 2. Iceland, 3. Netherlands, 4. Norway, 5. Denmark, 6. Finland, 7. Luxembourg, 8. Australia, 9. Canada, 10. Switzerland 11. Ireland & New Zealand 13. Germany 14. Austria 15. Malta 16. Spain 17. US 8. Czech Republic 19. Portugal 20. Belgium & Japan 22. Greece 23. UK 24. France 25. Mauritius 26 Costa Rica 27. Slovenia & Uruguay 28.

Flawed democracies

(Scores of 6-7.99) 29. South Africa, 30. Chile , 31. South Korea, 32. Taiwan, 33. Estonia, 34. Italy, 35. **India**, 36. Botswana & Cyprus, 38. Hungary, 39. Cape Verde & Lithuania, 41. Slovakia, 42. Brazil, 43. Latvia, 44. Panama , 45. Jamaica, 46. Poland , 47. Israel , 48. Trinidad and Tobago, 49. Bulgaria, 50. Romania, 51. Croatia, 52. Ukraine, 53. Mexico, 54. Argentina, 55. Serbia, 56. Mongolia, 57. Sri Lanka, 58. Montenegro, 59. Namibia & Papua New Guinea , 61. Suriname, 62. Moldova, 63. Lesotho & Philippines, 65. Indonesia & Timor Leste, 67. Colombia, 68. Macedonia, 69. Honduras, 70. El Salvador, 71. Paraguay & Benin, 73. Guyana, 74. Dom Rep, 75. Bangladesh & Peru, 77. Guatemala, 78. Hong Kong, 79. Palestine, 80. Mali, 81. Malaysia & Bolivia 81.

Hybrid regimes

(Scores of 4-5.99) 83. Albania, 84. Singapore, 85. Madagascar & Lebanon, 87. Bosnia and Herzegovina, 88. Turkey, 89. Nicaragua, 90. Thailand, 91. Fiji, 92. Ecuador, 93. Venezuela, 94. Senegal, 95. Ghana, 96. Mozambique, 97. Zambia, 98. Liberia, 99. Tanzania, 100. Uganda, 101. Kenya, 102. Russia, 103. Malawi, 104. Georgia, 105. Cambodia, 106. Ethiopia, 107. Burundi, 108. Gambia, 109. Haiti, 110. Armenia, 111. Kyrgyzstan, 112. Iraq.

Authoritarian regimes

(Score below 4) 113. Pakistan 114 Jordan, 115. Comoros & Morocco & Egypt, 118. Rwanda, 119. Burkina Faso, 120. Kazakhstan, 121. Sierra Leone, 122. Niger, 123. Bahrain, 124. Cuba & Nigeria, 126. Nepal, 127. Côte d'Ivoire, 128. Belarus, 129. Azerbaijan, 130. Cameroon, 131. Congo Brazzaville, 132. Algeria, 133. Mauritania, 134. Kuwait, 135. Afghanistan & Tunisia, 137.

Yemen, 138. People's Republic of China, 139. Swaziland & Iran, 141. Sudan, 142. Qatar, 143. Oman, 144. Democratic Republic of Congo, 145. Vietnam, 146. Gabon, 147. Bhutan & Zimbabwe, 149. Tajikistan, 150. UAE, 151. Angola, 152. Djibouti, 153. Syria, 154. Eritrea, 155. Laos, 156. Equatorial Guinea, 157. Guinea, 158. Guinea-Bissau, 159. Saudi Arabia, 160. Uzbekistan, 161. Libya, 162. Turkmenistan, 163. Myanmar, 164. Togo, 165. Chad, 166. Central Africa, 167. North Korea.

The Economist put all types of democracy in four categories on the basis of free and fair election process, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture. India has been fixed in the flaw category. In the above list, India is at 35 the number which shows that during the journey of 65 years, India achieved a good target and has a good status at the international scenario.

Post-independence India adopted and created many revolutionary and innovative idealistic approaches in the form of democratic institutions, free and fair elections and transformation of power and mixed economic path etc. On procedural part, several rules and regulation were made to make these institutions more effective but the situation is not as expected but still satisfactory. Although India has successfully completed sixty five years of democratic system and democratic institutions, processes are still evolving. After independence, leaders of the first generation promised to the common men that all these problems will be eradicated by the people's government. A model of developmental administration was introduced in order to mitigate the sufferings of the common people. While the pre requisites for democracy were absent in India, the legacy of the colonial period and diversity were the main challenges before the Indian democratic system. Several efforts were being made during last sixty five years but little has changed. The constitution of India, to a great measure, fulfilled the aspirations of the reformer. It is a revolutionary document that conferred the status of citizens to its people, and the subjects became “We, the citizens of India” who resolved to secure to all its citizens’ justice, liberty, equality and fraternity “thus assuring the dignity of the individual and unity and integrity of the country”. The constitution was adopted in January, 1950. It was a goal oriented mission statement of the nation, and is an embodiment of shared values, attitudes and activities. It determines the relationship of the individual with the state, prescribes the system of governance and limits of the state.

Good Governance

The Human Development Report 2000 has identified a few reasons for having good governance. However, they are mainly describing the features of good

governance. From the human development perspective good governance is identical to democratic governance. Democratic governance means that:

- Peoples' human rights are fundamental, freedom is respected, allowing to them live with dignity.
- People have a say in decisions that affect their lives.
- People can hold decisions, which are accountable.
- Women are equal partners with men.
- Private and public spheres of life and decision- making.
- People are free from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, class, gender or any other attribute.
- The needs of future generation are reflected in current policies.
- Economic and social policies are responsive and are responsive to people's needs and aspirations.
- Economic and social policies aim at eradicating poverty.
- There are a number of other reasons for cherishing good governance. In the present environment of rapid change which are non-linear resulting into uncertainty and inconceivability of high order, promotion of globalization resulting into multiple complexity, growing prosperity with increasing inequalities resulting into intense frustration, trauma, despondency and unrest, emergence of new technology resulting into growing awareness, good governance is a must to achieve positive results without witnessing negative impact.

Good Governance in India

The concept of good governance is not new for India. The concept in ancient Indian polity of the rulers being bound by 'Dharma' was precisely that of ensuring good and responsive governance to the people. 'Rajdharmā' was the code of conduct or Rule of law that was superior to the will of the ruler and governed all his actions. The Jataka tales, Shanti Parva of Mahabharata, Sukracharya's Nitisar, Panini's Ashtadhyayi, Attreya's Brahmana, Valimiki's Ramayana, Kautilya's Arthashastra and many other classics are replete with

descriptions of the tenets of good and responsive governance. During medieval period it existed in different forms. During the entire tortuous course of freedom struggle, self-government and good government became synonymous. After Independence, the preamble of the constitution reflects broadly goals and ideals the Indian State should pursue for the well-being of its people. The most important is “secure to all its citizens’ justice social, economic and political”. This, in fact summarizes the very purpose of any good state. Some of the Directive Principles require the state by way of good governance to secure. These directive principles are following:

- A social order for the promotion of welfare of all the people.
- Minimization of inequalities in income and elimination of inequalities in status.
- The right to adequate means of livelihood to all men and women.
- The operation of economic system to prevent concentration of wealth in a few hands,
- Equal pay for equal work for man and women
- Protection against abuse of health and strength of workers and the tender age of children,
- The right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disabilities
- That village Panchayats be organized as units of self-government
- Just and human conditions of work and maternity relief
- Living wages for workers to ensure decent standard of life and adequate leisure
- Free and fair compulsory education for all children below fourteen years of age, and
- Higher level of nutrition of and public health

While pursuing the above socio-economic objectives, the many valuable fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution to all citizens need also to be protected. These rights include freedom of speech, expression, association, profession, movement, belief and faith, equality before law, non-discrimination

on grounds only of religion, race, caste or place of birth, equalities of opportunity in matter of public employment etc.

In India the quality of governance during the first 25 years of independence was not much to fault with. Most of the top political leaders of these years were nurtured by high ideals like service before self during the freedom struggle but things started deteriorating from early 70s. Politics was perceived to have become a 'profession', rather than an instrument for the service of the people. No means were considered unfair to gain control of the state institutions like the independent judiciary, and non-political civil services felt the pressure of these development. With these malpractices, government started to work and took initiatives to control these malpractices and started various reformative steps at every level therefore results can be seen everywhere. In the present research paper an attempt has been made to evaluate the Indian democratic system on the parameters of good governance which are the most acceptable at the international scenario.

Participation in Decision Making Process

Participation is the sharing in the decision making process of the country by its people either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives. Decision making process should have to be spread over the lower echelons as far as possible. The agencies of the government should involve people in activities ranging from planning to implementation and from review to evaluation of all developmental initiatives. In India, people have appropriate participation in decision making process in political system and there is no discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, race and gender etc. Everybody has the right to participate in the system everywhere in the country. 73rd constitutional amendment is a landmark in this direction which provides 1/3rd increased seats to the women at the grass root level.⁶ Through this amendment women are also holding a minimum of 33 per cent seats and somewhere they have even more representation than this one. With this constitutional amendment, over three million women are now actively participating in shaping the policies and programs of the country. While woman's participation in formal decision making arenas has been less visible, their participation in grass root democracy and social movements is very high. They are defeating their male members on various counts. Before this amendment women had only a few seats at the local level and about only eight per cent at state and centre level. Now they are playing a positive role in decision making process at every level. It indicates that people have good participation in decision making process.

Transparency

It means inputs and the process of decision- making are easily accessible to all the citizens and that too in the comprehensive form. Information must be enough and provided in easily understandable forms and media. It is in fact the information, which builds up trust and confidence in the people, which in turn is very important for a government to be effective. Apart from the information, the public institutions must operate in an impartial manner, free from all biases of caste, class, religion and gender and must display a fair and predictable set of rules.⁷ Right to information act is a milestone in this direction and has opened the door to get the information. Now people have the right to get any type of information except in defense matters. This right to information act empowers the people and makes the system more transparent. It is milestone in the way of achieving the target of transparency and makes the system more transparent. But this act has its limitations, because only aware, conscious and literate people can be benefited by it. Structurally there is a separate institution to make it more effective, but there is lack of attitude.

Accountability

It indicates that an organization is generally accountable to those who get affected by its decisions or actions. In a democratic system people have the supreme power. People's representatives take their power from the common people who are sharing power. In India, political leadership is accountable themselves to the people. They go among the people when they need votes to win the election and people have indirect control over them through their opinion.

Responsibility

Responsibility describes liability to give a satisfactory account of the exercise of power vested in some authority to the people who are the real stakeholders. Therefore the system of responsibility to which a government or administration is subject to may be built in the constitutional provisions, statutes, rules and judicial decisions. If looked into the Indian system, it can be found that concept of responsibility was very much inherent in the leaders of 60s and 70s. They had the feeling of responsibility towards their duties but after two decades, the situation has deteriorated. However, in November 1996 the Conference of Chief Secretaries realized that there is crisis in the Indian administration and therefore the governance at every level needed to reinvent itself to serve the interests of the people at large. Day-to-Day governance is by bureaucracy; hence, it was in the fitness of things that the top bureaucrats of the country work up to the need of what they called "an effective and responsive administration in India". This was followed by the chief ministers' conference on May 24, 1997, convened by the Prime Ministers' Conference to discuss the action plan for effective and

responsive administration. The action plan, as adopted at this conference, suggested the formulation of Citizens' Charter, transparency and accountability, reasonable standards of service and the limits, public interface and code of conduct of ethics for civil servants.

Effectiveness and Efficiency

The processes and the institutions involved in governance should produce results that meet the needs and demands of the society while making the best use of resources at the disposal. Efficiency and effectiveness must be expressed in terms of administrative rules, budget making and routinization of activities towards attainment of the national goals, the community goals and individual goals. In India, political institutions are playing a role in this direction and the government has made several efforts to achieve the national goals in the country.

Equity

Democracy ensures social and economic equity to its people. A society's well-being depends on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the main stream of society. This requires all groups, particularly the most vulnerable ones like the women and disadvantage, have ample opportunities to improve or maintain their well being. People should have greater influence in the decisions making process of the government. Successful decentralization always improves efficiency of a government. Indian government made several provisions for women through constitutional amendments and for scheduled castes, tribes and for other backward classes that are socially and economically deprived. Due to all these provisions, they are coming forward and getting respectable status in the society.

Constitution provides equal opportunities to all the people of the country on all bases socially and economically. Being a welfare state government it makes special provisions for the backward sections of the society, socially and economically. For example the government has reservation for the schedule castes, schedule tribes and other backward classes in service and other fields to bring them in the mainstream of the country. Resulting, they are coming forward and playing a crucial role in every sector of the country. These classes have an ample opportunity to improve or maintain their well-being. Panchayati Raj Institutions are a landmark in this direction by which all people including women are enjoying their political rights. In the context of India, women and

other disadvantaged groups have proper representation in the government and as well as in public sectors through reservation.

Indian democracy is young but it has shown its maturity during its journey in different forms and got the 35th rank on the basis of free and fair election process, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture. Efforts are continuously going on to bring out the good governance approach in the system at transparency, participation, accountability, responsibility and effectiveness levels. Although all these efforts are in the process, but are giving the positive results at the political level along with the administration. Right to information act and Panchayati Raj constitutional amendment are milestones in achieving the goal of good governance which is helping to bring out transparency and active participation of the common men in the system. Although there is a long journey to achieve the goal of good governance, efforts at government and administration level will make this way short positively.

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