
UNIT 27 DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT: AN ASSESSMENT

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27.1 INTRODUCTION

Discourse on both the democracy and development in India denotes two contradictory points about their assessment, i.e., one, the democracy and development have succeeded; and, two, these have failed. This applies to democracy and development when these are dealt with as interdependent or independent of each other i.e., whether they are compatible or not. This unit presents an overview of the assessment of democracy and development in India as two distinct phenomena and also in relation to each other. Having discussed briefly the evolution of democracy and the models and strategies of development in India, this unit discusses the democracy in India as both - procedural and substantive.

27.2 DEMOCRACY

Following Independence India adopted a democratic system of governance. Institutions of democracy in India in fact began to grow during the colonial rule. They evolved through various Acts of the British India Government and as a result of the demand within India and a section in England. The provisions of democracy found their place in the Government of India Acts of 1909, 1919 and 1935. Following the deliberations within the Constituent Assembly, democracy was introduced in the post-independence India in 1950 with coming into effect India's Republican Constitution.

India opted for the parliamentary form of government in order to make the nation-state (modernity) based on the principles of universal adult franchise and periodic election in contrast to the village-level government in the light of Gandhian principles.

The assessment of democracy depends on the indices used to indicate or measure it. There are mainly two models of indices regarding democracy - one related to the institutional minimal, procedural democracy; two related to the substantive or effective democracy. The former views democracy in terms of the presence of the institutions of democracy, political

parties and other associations or organisations, periodic elections, universal adult franchise, leadership, etc. The latter does not consider the institutional/procedural/electoral democracy as comprehensive indicator of the democracy. The electoral democracy, in fact, is minimalist, which is also marked by a large number of factors which are inimical substantive to democracy. It is rarely concerned with what happens beyond elections, in the social space. Alternatively, the substantive democracy views the phenomenon of democracy in the light of its disgregation and diffusions, redistributive justice, human capabilities and entitlements (education, health, infrastructure, etc.), social capital/associated factors (trust, values, norms), civil society, human rights and dignities, governance (participation, accountability, efficacy, transparency, etc.) These are contingent on development as development in turn is contingent upon democracy. The impetus of the debate on the democracy in India has been on the transition, consolidation and deepening of democracy. The first two issues dominated the debate during the first two decades of democracy in the post-Independence period and the deepening of democracy became an issue of focus in the recent period. The assertion of various identities/new social movements - the process of democratisation, have contributed to the project of deepening democracy. But it is dependent on the participation of various communities cutting across the cleavages. Sub-sections 27.2.1 and 27.2.2 deal with the procedural and substantive democracy in India.

27.2.1 Procedural Democracy

The observers of the procedural democracy largely believe that democracy in India has been successful. The criteria for this assessment are - participation and competition. These are indicated by the frequency of the elections in India and competition among political parties to contest elections. The percentage of turn out and the percentage of votes polled by parties are indicators of participation. The advocates of this approach are buoyant about the success of the electoral politics in India, which is taken as the general pattern of success of democracy. Those who see success of democracy in terms of elections - participation and competition follow survey methods to measure democracy. They infer the dominant trends in the election in terms of the turn out and the percentage of vote or use of statistical method - correlation, coefficient or the regression analysis. They see the multivariable relationship of the turn out percentage and participation with the socio-economic data in particular constituencies. On the grounds that this analysis is based on survey, and takes into account the socio-economic and political factors of a particular region, it is also called the ecological analysis. However, some of the scholars who follow survey-based analysis feel that survey analysis are full of errors, are not backed by the qualitative data and also do not provide data for the period between elections. During the first fifteen years following Independence, scholars like Rajni Kothari, M. Franda, Paul R Brass, Field and Myron Wiener used the survey method to conduct election studies. All kinds of factors crime, caste, religion, etc., become effective in elections. The survey method has been carried forward by several scholars, and during the past two decades the psephologists have also used it.

Procedural democracy was meant to contribute to the nation-building in India. The focus of studies on democracy in India in the earlier decades following independence had been to examine as to how it helped in the nation-building through the introduction of the universal adult franchise and periodic elections. It was known as the modernisation theory. The modernisation theory claimed that the developing countries underwent a process of modernisation

- whose ultimate aim would be stable democracy: it would be accompanied with the socio-economic modernisation - urbanisation, spread of mass media, education, wealth and equality. It **was** believed that the development in India would strengthen democracy and the divisions based on caste, religions, etc., would disappear.

However, these hopes were belied in the following period. Salig Harrison, apprehended a dangerous decade in India in the 1960s in the face of recurrent linguistic and ethnic violence. The violence which started in the 1950s itself, was further escalated in the 1960s and 1970s; the defeat of the Congress in several states in the 1967 assembly elections and the imposition of emergency in the country during 1975-1977 were examples of people's discontentment of emergency. Unable to meet the challenge democratically, the political executive responded to these by authoritarianism, personalisation of the institutions and imposition. Scholars responded to emergency as an aberration. Some scholars are critical of the modernisation thesis. The predominance of the modernisation approach cast in the behaviouralist/structural-functional analysis accorded priority to the question whether India would survive as a nation-state or not,

27.2.2 Substantive Democracy

The critique of procedural democracy is provided by the scholars who study the substantive democracy. In their opinion, it views democracy in a limited way. Electoral democracy is minimal democracy. Free and fair elections, universal adult franchise, political parties, pressure groups and availability of constitution etc. are not sufficient conditions for democracy, though they are necessary. Democracy has to be located in the society and taken out of the institutional mode. This alternative view of democracy can be termed as the substantive democracy. Beetham argued for a "social agenda of democratisation". Democracy has to be grounded in the reality of society, apart from the participation and competition in the elections. Fareed Zakaria, however, criticises the substantive democracy in that it views democracy in the normative terminology as "good governance", with a wide range of rights; it does not consider the descriptive democracy.

In the past two decades, in India, substantive democracy has also found a significant place in the discourse on democracy. The assessment of substantive democracy is sought to be made in relation to the role of the state (with democracy) on the issues concerning the nation-state - secularism, welfarism and development in India; and also the role of the state regarding these issues in the context of globalisation. Niraja Jayal argues that there are two types of arguments regarding the relationship between the state and democracy: one, there can be no democracy without an effective state which can exist when there is a strong civil society to counter the authoritarianism of the state. Jayal argues that both state and society are complimentary to each other in relation to the setting up of democracy. But in the absence of the universal criteria of citizenship, the particularistic interests can hijack the project of democracy. In her opinion Indian state is an interventionist state whose thrust has been developmental rather than welfare state.

Civil Society is also an essential ingredient of substantive democracy. In India there are two viewpoints on the civil society. One, it considers all associations and collective actions as civil society, irrespective of the issues they take up; two, only those associations which take up two issues of universal significance, not sectarian, and whose foundation is secular/universal are

considered civil society. Recently a new debate has got momentum in our country: the debate between the communitarians and the liberal, the relationship between the individuals and the communities; within and between them.

The rise of identity politics - dalits, OBCs, women, tribals, ethnicity, environmental issues, etc., - the new social movements – and the inability of the discourse which privileges democracy with the elections have necessitated the focus on substantive democracy. This has been viewed both as a challenge to the nation-state and as an increase in the democratic content of the country with the understanding that India is becoming more democratic, a position which Ashutosh Varshey opted. The most ardent critique of the nation-state perspective is provided in the writings of the scholars representing the peripheries of the country like North-East India. This perspective proposes the alternative in the form of the "province - state". Sanjib Baruah's book *Indian Against Itself* is a representative of this perspective. This all has happened with the simultaneous rise of the large number of issues - governance, civil society, social capital, human rights, etc. The existence of all these factors is taken as an indicator of the existence of democracy in the country. Even here there are opposite views which suggest both the absence and presence of these factors.

With the introduction of the 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendments, the decentralisation has been democratised and the scope of democracy has expanded to include the women, OBCs and dalits at the grass root level. Prior to this the dominant social groups exclusively dominated the institutions of the local self-governance. This defeated the very purpose of democracy. The transfer of 29 subjects to the local bodies has added to the democratic decentralisation, However, democratic decentralisation gets impeded in the light of the fact that in several cases women members of the PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions) are proxies of the male members of their families. The increasing role of crime, money, etc., has further eroded the credibility of local level democracy. Nevertheless, wherever the public action has coexisted with institutions of local self government, the institutions of local self government have functioned democratically.

Usually the assessment of democracy in India has been done at the national, state or district level and the functioning of the democracy at these levels has been independent of each other. There has been the "top-bottom", not the "bottom-up" approach to democracy in India. Atul Kohli, however, has covered three levels - nation, state and district in his book, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Crisis of Governability*.

Scholars like O'donnell have underlined the need to see the differences within democracy (citizenship). Following this tradition, Patrick Heller has "disaggregated" democracy in order to view the "its degrees" in India. Comparing Kerala with rest of the country, he opines that there is more democracy in Kerala than the rest of the country. It is possible due to the existence of the "robust civil society" and an "effective state" there unlike in rest of the country. Here the effective/substantive democracy is indicated by the progress in the areas of education, health and distributive justice, their extension to the subaltern groups.

In Rajni Kothari's opinion the Indian state played significant role in building democracy in the first two decades following Independence. It implemented welfare schemes and development programmes. Though it was a moderate state then, Indian democracy, during this phase, was

marked by the accommodation of all interests and building consensus. But since the 1970s, especially with the promulgation of emergency in India, the executive concentrated power in its hands. This eroded the moderateness of the state. As a result, the executive resorted to populism, undermining the democratic institutions and personalising institutions. The state virtually started acting against democracy.

Atul Kohli argues that the Indian democracy is facing a crisis of governability. It is indicated by the growing disjuncture between weakening institutions and multiplying demands. Erosion in the credibility of political parties, leaders, and the indisciplined political mobilisation of various social groups, and class conflicts within the society have caused the crisis of governability in India. The state elite has played a crucial role in the politics of political disorder - crisis of favourability.

L.I. and S.H. Rudolphs have attempted to comprehend the relationship of Indian state and political economy with the democracy in India. They analyse the mobilisation of people in terms of demand polity, and the role of the state in terms of command polity. But there is no necessary correlation between the type of regime - democratic or authoritarian and type of polity - command or demand. The nature of polity - whether it is demand or command, depends on the nature of economy and not the nature of the regime.

The survival of Indian democracy has baffled some observers, for whom it is a "puzzle" or "exception" of the third world political systems; it has survived diversities on the basis of caste, religion, language, etc., which often result in violence. Arend Lijphart explains this 'puzzle' by providing a consociational interpretation. The theory of consociationalism is based on the premise that in a multi-ethnic society, power is shared among different groups of the society. The consociationalism in a society is contingent upon four conditions: (1) government of coalition in which all ethnic groups are represented (2) cultural autonomy of groups of consociation (3) their proportional representation in politics and civil services and (4) minority veto on the issues concerning the minority rights and autonomy. Lijphart argues that the success of the Congress system, coalition governments, federalism, principles of protective discrimination, and constitutional provisions of the religious and cultural rights of minorities, and minority veto through political pressure are indications of the success of Indian democracy, in a consociational way. Indian democracy has survived on the principles of "power-sharing system" - as it prevails in Austria, Netherlands, Switzerland, Lebanon and some other countries. In this system all major groups shared power in a consociational way. This system prevailed during the first two decades following Independence. Lijphart, however, concedes that during the past few years with the decline of the Congress system, and attack on the minorities and the rise of the BJP, the trends have been in contravention to the consociational theory. Paul R Brass criticises the consociational model as not applicable to India at all. This is so both in the context of modern history and contemporary politics. Though different groups might come together to form a consociation or alliances, their internal squibblings always pose a threat to consociation.

27.3 DEVELOPMENT

Development is a recurrent theme in the discussion on democracy and social change. The concept has been used mainly by the sociologists and political scientists on the one hand, and by the economists on the other. The sociologists and political scientists use it as a modernisation paradigm,

which became popular to discuss the political and social change in the developing countries, liberated from the colonial folk. These changes were considered as development and modernisation, which indicated towards the process of nation – building or nation-state building, formation of political institutions (political parties, interest groups etc.), introduction of universal adult franchise and periodic election, written or unwritten constitution and level of urbanisation. The modernisation or development theories, influenced by behaviouralism were mainly concerned with the question as to how a system maintained itself by accommodating various segments of the system. It gave no space to the possibility of change or break-down of the system as a result of the challenge from within it.

For the economists, development meant the growth in terms of the per capita income and GNP. The modernisation theory of development, apart from the factors mentioned above, has also considered the per capita income and GNP indices of development.

Amartya Sen has provided an alternative model of development. For him the per capita income and the GNP are important but not enough indices of development. Development in the real sense of the term means developing the human capabilities among the people and entitlements in terms of education, health, infrastructure and liberty,

27.4 DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT

The debate on the relationship between democracy and development has dealt with two questions: are they compatible with each other? Or are they inimical to each other? Niraja Jayal asserts that this debate in India has been “somewhat misconceived”. It has basically been engaged by the economists. Deepak Nayyar argues that in India there has been tension between economic development and political democracy. There is inclusion of the people, especially the poor, in the democratic processes but they have been excluded from the market. The market has seen the exclusive predominance of the elite. The state has been mainly concerned with the management of the interests/conflicts of the elite. During the post-Independence period, the role of the state vis-a-vis management of the conflicts and towards the interests of the people, especially the poor has passed through three phases - from 1947-1966, 1967-1990, and from 1990 onwards. The first phase was marked by the prominent role of the state, which was able to reach the consensus of various interests. In the second phase, there was an erosion in the effectiveness of the state and the consensus model. The state made political efforts to accommodate the rich peasants, and resorted to populism and patronage for managing interests of various classes. This phase also saw decline in the poverty to some extent. The third phase known as the phase of liberalisation, is marked by the erosion in the credibility of the state, and rising role of market. It is happening along with politics of liberalisation. In Nayyar’s opinion for the first time in India economics of liberalisation and politics of empowerment are moving in the opposite directions. The people have the political rights but cannot participate in the market as they lack entitlements and capabilities. There is no attempt by the state to mediate or reconcile different interests. In such a situation, where the state cannot play an effective and mediating role, he suggests that the civil society can intervene.

Pranab Bardhan argues that democracy and development are irreconcilable. There are main proprietary classes in India - industrial capitalist class, rich farmers and the professionals in the

public sector. Their interests are in conflict and the state plays a mediating role among them. At the same time there is a "turmoil from below" – the assertion of various disadvantaged groups. There is a conflict between their interests and those of the propertied classes. There is also an anti-reform streak in the mobilisation of various groups. This makes the atmosphere hostile for economic reforms. Those who argue about the incompatibility of democracy and development refer to the countries of South East Asia where real development has taken place in the undemocratic regimes.

Amartya Sen has provided an unequivocal perspective on development and democracy. They are not incompatible. Rather democracy and development are complimentary to each other. Democracy is possible if people in a society have the entitlements and possess capabilities which enable them to be part of the democratic process. Freedom, which is an essential ingredient of democracy, promotes development in terms of entitlements and the capabilities of people. Development is also contingent upon democracy.

27.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have discussed that there are two contradictory view-points about the assessment of democracy and development in India – these have succeeded and these have failed. The assessment of democracy and development is related to the meanings of these phenomena. There are two types of models of democracy discussed in relation to India: procedural and substantive. The former is mainly concerned with the institutions and processes of democracy. The latter places the democratic institutions and processes in the societal context – civil society, rights, etc. The dominant opinion of the scholars studying the procedural democracy considers that democracy in India has been a success, and those who study the substantive democracy do generally consider democracy in India as a failure. Development is also viewed in two ways – one, in terms of modern political institutions; two, in terms of the availabilities of the entitlements and capabilities to the people. There are two opposite opinions even about the compatibility of development and democracy.

27.6 EXERCISES

- 1) Explain the evolution and growth of democracy in India.
- 2) Discuss various conceptions of democracy
- 3) Evaluate the on-going debate on democracy and development.
- 4) Explain the concept of development and its relations with democracy.