

Inclusive Democracy: People, Power and Progress?

KUSUM LATA

Extension Lecturer, Department of Political Science
Government College for Girls Sector-14(Gurgaon)

ABSTRACT: “The primary meaning of democracy is that all who are affected by a decision should have the right to participate in making that decision, either directly or through chosen representatives To exclude the losing groups from participation in decision-making clearly violates the primary meaning of democracy.”

—Arthur Lewis, first Nobel Prize winner in the economics of development

According to the latest estimates, the Indian economy continues to grow at a rate of eight percent. But the question is whether this economic growth will create opportunities for all sections of society? What does this growth mean to Indian Democracy? While government says that a person who earns 26 to 32 Rs is not poor.

We have seen the case of a mother who sold her new born baby for six thousand rupees to pay off the hospital bill, the Vrindavan widows case where they denied dignity even after death, The latest case of Gurgaon where a women delivered her child in a private hospital her family pay Rs 80 lakhs but even after paying so much money the hospital demand 20 lakhs more and in case of nonpayment threaten to transfer the patient in the government hospital. When these types of issues come across our eyes some questions come to our mind i.e. what does democracy mean? Is this inclusive or exclusive in nature?

This paper will try to define what inclusive democracy means? What kind of steps is taken by government to make democracy more inclusive? Are they successful or facing some challenges? What is the difference in theory and practice? And due to these differences what type of contradictions exists in our society? Is this strengthen or weaken our country?

Keywords: Democracy, Inclusiveness, Power and Progress

INRODUCTION

Taking of the democracy, the first thought that comes to one's mind that India is the largest democracy of the world. It is not only the largest democracy but also a democracy which has been successfully operating for last 65 years. But the second thought that immediately creeps into mind is whether India is a democratic country only when it comes to casting of votes or it's a country, which includes democratic functioning at all levels of government institutions. The reference here is towards inclusive democracy. The difference between Democracy and Inclusive Democracy is same like the difference between an illiterate person who is considered to be literate just because of his/her ability to sign and a literate person who with the help of his/her literacy uses the reasoning faculty and leads one's life.

The term "democracy" originates from the antiquity and denotes "people's power" (from the Greek: demos – "people" and kratos – "power"). Democracy is not confined to merely holding of elections, having parliamentary debates or enacting laws. It is much wider; indeed, the real test of democracy lies in how inclusive it is. Success of democracy is judged by the extent to which people have progressed and is to be measured in terms of the numbers having access and equity in enjoying fruits of democracy. Welfare and care of every single member of the society, especially underprivileged, marginalized and the excluded, needs to be taken into consideration. Inclusive democracy must necessarily evolve into inclusive development; development not taken narrowly as only economic progress but also ensuring economic and social justice to every section of population.

Unless power structures created by democracy reflect people's aspirations, are sensitive to them and are responsive in terms of promoting welfare and empowerment of people, it remains a democracy only for the namesake. It's quite often we hear from the voice of famous politicians of the World, in print media, TV media etc. India is the largest democratic country of the World. It is true only on paper. If we go deep into the reality what is happening in India? In our democratic set up every one can contest and win any level of elections. Any citizen can become Prime Minister, President or Chief Minister or Minister. When we analyze all these, we find only millionaires are able to contest even at lowest level of elections and they are only able to win. These people only are able to grab the highest positions in the Government. A news paper survey indicating, in the ensuing U.P elections the candidates who are contesting from all parties included 35% criminals and 65% of them are millionaires only. When we see the functioning of our Parliament or Assemblies of any States at present, ruling and opposition parties fight with each other but they never use our democratic system to do some good for the people. Our country claims that it is working to make democracy more inclusive. But is this true?

Recently we celebrated our 66th independence day and we are very proud to be world largest and successful democracy. It is the right time to recollect on where we have reached, how much we successful to making our democracy inclusive. Any fair assessment would surely lead us to take pride and celebrate that in these six decades India has been hailed as a vibrant, dynamic democracy and heading to become the third largest economy of the world with a seat on the global high table. India despite of all problems (it has faced) its rambunctious democracy has pulled through. It has established a strong independent judiciary a powerful free media, a large pool of experts.

Though Indian government take some important steps such as enactment of RTE, RTI, Food Security and Public Service Grievances Redressal, MGNREGA to distribute the fruit of progress to every section of society or In other words, to make democracy more inclusive. But we should not ignore the reality that despite forgoing achievement even today a large section of society is suffering from hunger, malnutrition, preventable diseases, lack of drinking water, lack of sanitation facility and lack of health care facilities. Number of farmers committing suicide squeezing under loan burdens and lacking of necessary facilities to carry their vocation is mind boggling. On one hand millions tones of food grain is getting rotten while on the other hand people dying due to hunger, prices of essential commodities especially food items on rising while government set poverty line below 26 or 32 rupees per day.

Country continuously facing the problems such as ethnic violence (as happening in Assam), or rising of Naxalism, there is growing concern that institutions and professions are losing their credibility fast. The atmosphere is of serious crises of confidence as size of corruption and number of scams coming in the light frequently. So this is appropriate time to analyze what kind of democracy is in our country prevail today, is it becoming inclusive or more exclusive? The main objective of this study will be to examine how Inclusive Indian democracy is? To determine the problems that prevents India to being an inclusive democracy.

Please think for a minute on some recent cases like:

Arresting a professor of Jadavpur University for criticizing Mamata Banarjee's whimsical politics and releasing him on bail; wonderful fodder has been supplied to the media to chew, yell and scream. I wonder what is going on in India actually; is it democracy or some sort of a fooling and monarchy in the garb of democracy?

This is a country where just before few days ago we read an extended article on how Kasab, the Mumbai mass murderer enjoying the luxury of six expert chefs in Mumbai prison. All of us know that Afsal Guru is kept in the Tihar Jail with VVIP security and treatment.

In a Tamil Nadu, family which has almost looted the state and the country is sitting pretty and the cornered political leader passes mindless remarks on the ruling party and their activities through the media. Every day we read that a former minister of Tamil Nadu is raided, arrested or their kin murdered gruesomely in as a result of the wicked activities mostly land grabbing.

A self proclaimed social worker, a migrant from the USA has been holding a powerful nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu to ransom in the name of public security while the whole state is reeling under power shortage and heavy power cuts. There are more than ninety FIRs filed on him but he has not been arrested notwithstanding his constant agitations are impeding any further activity. There is section of electronic media, press and public keep talking in favors his agitation and kindling more unrest. A newly appeared news channel has indentified some important 'Tamilians' for their contribution to the Tamil culture, literature, entertainment and what not at a gala function. The selection sounds very awkward and odd; the achievers range from very old to very young leaving behind many real achievers.

Now the UPA government shows interest in having FDI ties with its arch rival Pakistan. Whether it provides FDI or not it will definitely be a conduit for sending more militants and terrorist inside India. So what? In the name secularism, even if they are caught they will never be punished. Truly, Indian's democratic approach and democratic values, and democratic expressions cannot match any other democracy in the world.

About this so called inclusive democracy. Mr. J. Ajitkumar in his article dying democracy very rightly said that Democracy, so cooked up the clever American Abraham Lincoln the phrase is by the people, of the people, for the people. However, like in all things Indian there is a catch. It looks true all right, but not really, for the sub phrase 'for the people' doesn't exactly hold. It most certainly doesn't come through in the practice of democracy as given in various societies worldwide. Democracy promised the best form of representative rule but invariably the actual power lands in the hands of few who wield it with no qualms. In many of the bigger and populous nations, the system is tending to 'democracy' or 'demoncracy'. Coteries and collaborators unelected by the common man are taking over reigns in many major democracies. Electoral politics has brought down democracy from nobler echelons to the lowest levels of probity.¹ India must become a deeper, more inclusive democracy. It is the largest democracy because it is the most populous country in the world to elect its government. However, India is not the deepest democracy yet. Deep democracy requires government 'of the People, for the people, and by the People' too. We have government of the people. But Indians are not convinced that their government is for the people. They want it to be more accountable to them. naxalism and other movements like this are evidence in this regard. Recently released MLA Jhinna Hikkaka was dictated by naxelist to resign

¹<http://www.boloji.com/index.cfm?md=Content&sd=Articles&ArticleID=7557>

from his post and what Sukma collector Alex Paul Mennon experience during his twelve day of abduction was shocking that there was not a single primary school for children or any basic infrastructure like hospitals and roads. While government spent 2500 crore per annum to fight naxelist only 100 meter area. If government spend only 5% of this amount than there will be no conflict because they are fighting for their rights from which they are deprived for a long time .I never understand where inclusiveness in government actions here is. Are they getting fruits of the progress of country which is proud of 8% GDP growth? Do you consider the present democratic system in India is the truest form of democracy? A deep democracy must be government by the people too. A democracy in which citizenship is not merely the right to vote for members of assemblies, but a democracy in which citizenship is also the active management by people of their own affairs. Four decades after granting its people universal adult franchise, the Indian Parliament passed the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution to empower people to manage their own affairs in their villages and towns. Two decades have passed since then. The deepening of democracy those amendments sought remains to be implemented.

There are hundreds/ thousands of cases which compel us to think over: is our democracy inclusive in nature or become more exclusive? Is it a fiction or reality? So let us try to examine the definition of democracy is it represented by which given by US President Abraham Lincon as govt. of the people, for the people and by the people or represent another definition as describe by professor N.D.Tiwari as government off the people, far the people and buy the people.

Inclusive Democracy: A Fiction or Reality

People

Whenever we talk about democracy, the strongest pillar of it always remains the 'people'. To think of any institution in a democratic setup which is not responsible to the people is misnomer. Insertion of the words 'we the people.....' in the preamble of our constitution is an evidence of it. But this statement in today's era of globalization sounds redundant and a fiction because it has, now, become the tool in the hands of the most powerful people of our country. It is these people sitting at the top most position who make laws and implement them through our young generation is being motivated by some people raise their voice against injustice yet a huge disparity is clearly seen. **Now there are visible examples of discrimination at various levels like-in the name of caste, religion, gender, and discrimination based on class.**

Marxist revolutionary, Che Guevara had once said, 'Democracy cannot consist solely of elections that are nearly always fictitious and managed by rich landowners and professional politicians.' If we contrast this verily quote with what Aristotle had to say we will find how far the intents and ideals of democracy have moved from their original interpretations. When Aristotle said,

'In democracies the poor are more powerful than the rich, because there are more of them and whatever is decided by the majority is sovereign'. Did he have in mind the virtuosity of rulers or the power of awareness of people? Don't we miss both? In most of the democratic set-ups today technically at least owing to either gerrymandering or number of candidates or parties the triumph may come even with less than one third of the total ballots cast. Quite sadly though any discussion of democracy involves ramblings about civic sense but somewhere the talk of ethics and morals values remains untouched. We can't have a stronger paradox than that. It is not that toleration of other's views and deference toward other societies is not nestled in the spirit of democracy but a skewed picture of democracy does give ample room for such discrepancies to creep in.

Democracy is for whom? It is said democracy is agent which works for people and to make their life good rather than other systems. So what our democracy reveals let's see some facts:

Poverty

Poverty in India is widespread, with the nation estimated to have a third of the world's poor. In 2011, World Bank stated, 32.7% of the total Indian people falls below the international poverty line of US\$ 1.25 per day (Purchasing Power Parity) while 68.7% live on less than US\$ 2 per day

The latest UNICEF data shows that one in three malnourished children worldwide are found In India, whilst 42 percent of the nation's children under five years of age are underweight. It also shows that a total of 58 percent of children under five surveyed were stunted. Rohini Mukherjee, of the Naadi foundation-one of the NGO's that published the report-stated India is "doing worse than sub-Saharan Africa.

India's poverty line has always been a matter of huge debate, but it was a discussion mostly confined to economists and policymakers. But the matter has now gone public, following a row about an affidavit from the planning commission to the supreme court of India, in which the official poverty line was set at 26 rupees (around \$0.53) per person per day in rural areas and 32 rupees in urban areas. This can only be a good thing, because the official attempts to measure poverty are not just arcane, but riddled with contradictions.

How exactly are these numbers arrived at? The measure was developed in the early 1970s, when a group of experts decided the appropriate line would be set according to the average monthly consumption expenditure of households whose members consumed (per capita) 2,400 calories of food per day in rural India and 2,100 calories per day in urban India.

Subsequently, the poverty line has simply been updated using consumer price indices. These numbers now have little to do with actual calorie consumption because food consumption patterns have changed. However, the use of that line has been defended by official sources who have argued that, at that level of expenditure, families could afford to buy minimum food and have simply chosen not to.

Of course, this begs the question of whether it is really choice or the urgent need to consume other items (energy, healthcare and so on) that determine patterns of spending. Nevertheless, it is precisely this line (annually updated by consumer price indices) that has been used to describe the extent of poverty in India for decades. This was roughly similar to the World Bank's estimate of \$1 a day (now \$1.25 a day) per person, not at nominal exchange rates, but at purchasing power parity (PPP) exchange rates²

In February this year, came from The Statesman News Service (reporter unnamed). This one took out details on Dr. Ahluwalia's global forays between May and October 2011. In that period, he undertook "four trips covering 18 nights [which] cost the exchequer a sum of Rs. 36,40,140, an average cost of Rs 2.02 lakh a day," says the SNS report.³ As we say common man is wearer of power in democracy above mentioned instance shows what? A common man worth only 26 to 32 rupees for survival while a policy maker or so called representative spends millions of rupees on their one foreign visit. What all this shows Inclusiveness or Exclusiveness of democracy?

According to the 2001 census, there are 12.6 million children under the age of 14 engaged in child labour. This is surely a conservative estimate. The government estimates also do not acknowledge the millions of children working in agriculture. Civil society places the number of child labour at a more realistic 40 million or so.

Approximately 70 per cent of children in child labour are in agriculture. Owing to the labour intensive nature of cotton production, the use of child labour in cotton fields, especially for cross-pollination, has increased over the years. Children working in cotton fields are continuously exposed to poisonous pesticides. Apart from the health effects such as headaches, nausea and respiratory ailments borne out by various studies, children working in cotton fields are deprived of schooling. Working long hours in the field means that children cannot attend school regularly or even if they are enrolled, invariably drop out at some point.⁴ Democracy may be just a political system of governance but it is humanity that propelled it to come into being. Without humanity democracy is just a body shaking but not moving and alive but not growing. It is imperative on our part that if we pretend to care for democracy we should also care for what I hold as nothing short of temple: primary schools among other things. Unfortunately the primary schools which give the child the first embrace of his life outside his mother are too clumsy and repulsive. The beginning gets as worse as it could get. It goes without saying that often it is none but democracy that bears the brunt of an adulthood grown out of uncomfortable or absent embraces.

CASTE

While the Constitution of India decrees equality for all, in reality India is a complexity of layers, social structures and hierarchies which deny large numbers of its citizens their very basic rights. Scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes are guaranteed equal opportunities for education and work under the law, but the age-old practices of caste discrimination often ensure that these opportunities do not come their way.

For a country which has been independent for 65 years, it is a matter of shame that we have not yet shaken off the tyranny of caste-based discrimination. Countless people have to live in degrading conditions, children are unable to go to school, employment avenues are closed, and even education does not open bigoted minds. No measure of progress can be true unless the question of people's equality is factored into it. And we can only be considered a progressive nation when we refuse to accept caste differences. Neither education nor high posts can change backward thinking, as the experience of Balwant Singh shows. Mr Singh thought that it was uneducated people who practiced caste-based discrimination, but he discovered that even after becoming an IAS officer, he still faced discrimination for being from a "lower" caste. Mr. Singh tendered his resignation in 1962, but nothing has changed since then. Member of Parliament P L Punia is the Chairman of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, and a retired IAS officer too. Despite all this, just last year, Mr. Punia was denied entry to a Kali temple in Odisha because he is from a scheduled caste, and his community has traditionally not been allowed to enter the temple.⁵

The other incident which shows that certain minor religious differences create havoc in the lives of few people is the problem of Khap Panchayat which imposes its whip through social boycotts and fines and in most cases ends up by killing or forcing the victims to commit suicide. All this is done in the name of brotherhood and its honour. Khap Panchayats have been powerful than the Government. So the Right to Life is violated and government has still not taken strong measures to stop this dictatorship of

²<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/oct/04/india-measuring-poverty-line>

³<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/columns/sainath/article3439624.ece>

⁴<http://indiafacts.in/child-labour/child-labour-in-india/>

⁵<http://www.satyamevjayate.in/issue10/videos/zAmu5QL2qeM/>

Khap. Even the government has not done much to control their power which again questions the inclusivity of democracy where people are still being killed and their right to life is snatched from them. 'Honour killings' are human-rights abuses, atrocities against women, denial of an individual's freedom of choice, and in contravention of the law. As India tries to fly high, such disgraceful practices will derogate its international reputation. To ignore for too long the frequency of such monstrous acts will cost us heavily. Though Indian judiciary has come up as a silver lining, yet much is left. Since time requires us to break the shackles of slumber and respond efficiently. But question is why do Khaps still exist in these times of formal democracy in India? Why the elected panchayats had a little scope in the matters of governance that are otherwise usurped by Khaps for dispensing justice in an inhumane and unconstitutional manner?

Religion

Contrary to the secular tenets of our constitution, we have seen a distinct rise in religion fundamentalism in the country; Disputes based on religion are increasing. It portends a dangerous future. People are still being treated as vote banks, and all political and administrative decisions are taken, after considering the effect of the same on the vote bank. The consequences of this are already discernable, in the slackening of the pace of development and economic growth of the country. Well, on the other hand, it is also true that "people get the government they deserve." This does apply to us. The dismally low level of education and correspondingly great disparity in their economic growth makes such people gullible to mechanization of crafty politicians. Such people act as a fodder on which the ambitions of politicians flourish.⁶

Challenge of access to justice

Justice is also another area where discrimination is still prevalent and where democracy fails to be inclusive. For instance 'A former trial court judge has been sentenced to three years' rigorous imprisonment for taking Rs 2,000 as bribe in a 26-year-old case. Saying a judge's ethical firmness is the need of the hour, special CBI judge V K Maheshwari held former judge GulabTulsiyani (74) guilty of demanding and accepting bribe for disposal of a factory challan case in 1986. Tulsiyani was a metropolitan magistrate at Patiala House court at that time. The judgment reads as follows:

"Judicial office is an office of public trust, therefore, high integrity, honesty and ethical firmness is the requirement of society from the judge. A judge's conduct is expected to be judged by standards higher than that expected from any other public servant. The confidence in judiciary is getting shattered day by day. Today judiciary is suffering from self-inflicted wounds... "The court said while imposing a fine of Rs 50,000 on Tulsiyani.

The court, however, suspended its sentence till May 28 after the convict expressed his wish to appeal against his conviction. While releasing him on interim bail on a personal bond of Rs 50,000 with a surety of the same amount, it asked Tulsiyani to appear before it on May 29.'

When we read such news items, if not anything, the blood pressure of any honest citizen (if at all anyone of this blessed country!) is bound to shoot up. Pray, what type of nation we live in? Is this case such a complex one which needed to be heard for 26 long years to give a verdict like this? Anyway, this is not going to stop here as the accused is bound to move to High and then Supreme Court if necessary to prove his 'innocence'.

Similar is the case of BangaruLaxman's judgment after 11 years. John David, a murderer of a college student Navarasu was nabbed only after two decades. He was at large and also working in an IT firm at Chennai. He had done a cold blooded murder of his junior, that too the son of a Vice Chancellor and almost got away with it. Sankararaman's murder inside the Kanchi temple case is still going on!

At this rate one can foresee when and what sort of judgments will come for the cases of 2G Scam, Adarsh Housing and CWC Games scandals. True. We claim that we live in a fast world; but when it comes to the court proceedings we should be slowest in the whole world. We prefer to deny justice by delay.⁷

FINDINGS

Poverty, Cast, Religion, Untouchability and Corruption are some major causes which prevent India being an inclusive democracy. If we closely analyze we will find that poverty is the main hindrance in being democracy inclusive. It restrains people to become aware, educated and to participate in democratic set-up and further become the root cause of rising terrorism, naxalism, corruption etc.

SUGGESTIONS

⁶<http://anishg.hubpages.com/hub/Democracy-in-India-a-success-or-a-failure>

⁷<http://www.boloji.com/index.cfm?md=Content&sd=Articles&ArticleID=12204>

The inequalities and injustices which we have seen cannot be addressed without dealing with the issue of governance deficit, ethical and moral deficit in various professions. To dealing with this problem we must have strengthen our education system because education is the only way to inculcate democratic values in citizens and it is the only weapon which could break the vicious circle of poverty and other social evil.

CONCLUSION

Considering all these factors where one sees the gaps in working of democracy to give equal opportunity to all, where discrimination is still made on the basis of class, caste religion, gender and economical status. One can conclude that it is only a fiction that India has an inclusive democracy because the above mentioned problems clearly show that it is still a dream and effort should be made to make our democracy more inclusive. No country can be described as being completely democratic but efforts can be made towards providing a just and equal society. There is continues struggle for recognition of all persons as equal and for their dignity to be maintained. There is an urgent need to bring a change on large scale which can only take place through collective struggle. Inclusive democracy must necessarily evolve into inclusive development (development not taken narrowly as only economic progress but also ensuring economic and social justice to every section of population).

References:

Democracy in India - a success or a failure available at:

<http://anishg.hubpages.com/hub/Democracy-in-India-a-success-or-a-failure>

Kumar, J. Ajith. Democracy Dying, available at: <http://www.boloji.com/index.cfm?md=Content&sd=Articles&ArticleID=7557>

Subramanian, Ananthapriya. No More Excuses to Eliminating Child Labour available at:

http://www.tehelka.com/story_main46.asp?filename=Ws170710AnanthapriyaSubramanian.asp

Swaminathan, G. Denial of Justice available at: <http://www.boloji.com/index.cfm?md=Content&sd=Articles&ArticleID=12204>

Untouchability Episode 10: Dignity For All (satyamevjayate) available on

<http://www.satyamevjayate.in/issue10/videos/zAmu5QL2qeM/>