

Future of Democracy in India

Or

India and Democracy

Essay No. 01

“For forms of government let fools contest

Whatever is administered best, is the best.”

— Alexander Pope

These famous lines were written by Alexander Pope in the 18th century but they are as true today as they were when they were written for the first time. The form of government does not matter at all. What matters is the happiness and the welfare of the masses. Any form of government is good if the people are happy and prosperous. India is having a democratic form of government for the people, by the people, of the people. Everyone in a democracy is supposed to be free, responsible and happy. Democracy ensures an equality of opportunity to all.

The working of Democracy in India, at times, makes one feel that there is something basically wrong with the democratic system of government. It is no child's play to fight an election. It is a very expensive game. Really talented persons do not come forward to contest the elections. Success in the election depends upon the patronage of the corrupt businessmen, local gundas and professional politicians. Consideration of caste or religion also plays an important part. Majority of the voters are illiterate and poor. Most of the people who manage to be elected, do not deserve the honour at all. In Assemblies and the Parliament, they enter into mud-slinging, fist fighting and useless shouting. The angry and frustrated masses come out in the streets. Their anger is exploited by the opposition parties and they start burning public property, attacking public servants and paralyzing work.

It was this state of affairs that the Indira Gandhi Government tried to control by imposing an Internal Emergency in the country. The people of the country rejected the idea of limited dictatorship and defeated the Indira Gandhi government. The Janata party came into power. Democracy which appeared to be badly derailed was claimed to be put back on the

rails. Everybody thought that things would change for the better. But nothing of the sort happened.

As a result, the people of India once again lost faith in democracy. They started feeling that democracy and discipline could not perhaps go together. Once again, they made up their mind to pay any price for the sake of discipline and order in national life. That is why they voted Indira Gandhi, the author of the black emergency, back to power once again. Mrs. Gandhi strengthened democracy still further. She took the country to the pinnacles of glory. When she was shot dead, a wave of violence and arson swept the country. But the new government acted quickly and controlled the situation. Soon after, the General Election for the 8th Lok Sabha were held. The people of India reposed their faith in the ruling party headed by Rajiv Gandhi. After a brief stint of opposition rule, the people of India once again voted the Congress back to power. Prime Minister P.V. Narashimha Rao was called upon to lead the country after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. The peaceful conduct of elections proved once again that Democracy had taken deep and firm roots in India. An era of coalition governments appears to be on the cards now. In our multiparty system, it appears difficult for a single party to gain absolute majority. The coalitions, however, are going to prove stable in the country. There is no cause for worry or alarm. The country is now coming up as a great power in Asia. Democracy has certainly come to stay.

There is no doubt that Democracy as a system of government does have some flaws and failings. But there is no better system of government devised so far. Totalitarian regimes have crumbled down like a house of cards one after the other. We may have to plug certain loopholes but we cannot do away with Democracy. The democratic system of government in India is getting stronger and stronger every day.

Essay No. 02

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Democracy is more a way of life than a form of government. Defined by Abraham Lincoln as the government “of the people, for the people and by the people”, democracy is a form of government in ‘which the sovereign power is in the hands of the people and is exercised by them directly or indirectly through their representatives. In a democratic form of government which we in India have adopted, each citizen, irrespective of caste, creed, sex or religion gets full opportunity for expressing his will and for developing his personality. He is assured justice—both social and economic.

India has been described as the largest democracy in the world with a population of over 90 crores. However, it lags behind in many respects. It is a crying shame that nearly 30% of our people are still living below the poverty line even after about five decades of independence. There must be something wrong in our democratic system where the majority of the electorate wielding real power live and die in abject poverty, are malnourished, uneducated and unemployed. The hungry man is periodically asked to choose between the ballot and his daily bread; given a choice, he would any day prefer the latter. We may claim from rooftops that the country has achieved stupendous progress in agricultural and industrial spheres. But the fruits of this progress have been monopolised by only a handful and it is a fact that, with each passing year, the rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer. This lopsided distribution of wealth has generated cynicism among the people—a portent signal that poses a threat to our democracy.

For the proper working of democracy, there should be a healthy opposition, educated electorate, independent judiciary, free press and, above all, unimpeachable moral integrity. Does the Indian democracy possess all these essential attributes? The answer, unfortunately, is in the negative.

But, to our credit, it must be said that we have had ten general elections so far and have had a fairly representative government as well as a viable Opposition. Democratic values, enshrined in our Constitution, are our beacon light and our leaders follow them to the best of their ability within the given constraints of economic, ethnic, religious and cultural diversity as well as their political considerations. In this sense, the future of democracy in India is very bright. Most post-Second World War nations, that attained independence almost at the same time as India, have either become dictatorships or are under martial law or have simply degenerated into anarchy. There is hardly any semblance of democracy in most of the third world nations today.

It is, however, a crying shame that we still fight over caste; colour, creed or narrow sectarian considerations. In a secular country, with no official religion, communalism raises its hydra head time and again with the result that people lose all sense of values in getting at one another's throats. A new dimension has recently been added to the destabilization process of the world's biggest democracy in the form of terrorism, which has now entered the hi-tech era. This must be stopped forthwith and all our energies be channelized towards nation-building activities. We must all gear ourselves to work for the amelioration of the lot of our people suffering from grinding poverty that has become their destiny from the cradle to the grave.

In order to remove or at least reduce poverty, we must ensure adequate education and means of livelihood to all able-bodied citizens. Once this is done, India will be

in the forefront of developed nations with an enviable growth rate and a stable economy. Along with it shall come other benefits of development and progress like education, healthcare, old-age homes, full or near-full employment, etc. In this pursuit of industrial and material progress, however, we must not lose sight of the latest advances in agriculture, for India is predominantly an agricultural country.

Orthodox democracy has proved itself unequal to the exigencies of India. The problem is to modify the traditional institutions of democracy to suit the present day conditions the inefficiency of democracy first became noticeable in its economic aspect. One of the most important problems for democracy in India, therefore, is to manage economic system in such a way as to ensure for everybody a reasonable standard of living coupled with a reasonable amount of security and liberty.