Democratic Politics and Governance in India

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Abstract

Democratic politics is a system where power rests with the people, who participate directly or through elected representatives, emphasizing equality, justice, accountability, and rule of law, contrasting with centralized power in authoritarian regimes. Key aspects include free and fair elections, constitutional limits on government, protection of minority rights, power-sharing, and public engagement in decision-making, all designed to ensure governance within defined limits and uphold citizen rights. It upholds citizens rights, rule of law, sovereignty of the people, accountability and power sharing. Democratic politics involves continuous negotiation, conflict, and cooperation over interests, ideas, and resources, as seen in debates over issues like representation, language, or economic policy. It's a dynamic process where citizens and leaders work to shape society within a framework that aims for stability, justice, and inclusive governance. The nature of polity and the role of civil society plays a vital role in reshaping democratic politics and governance. Governance is the system of processes, rules, and structures for making and implementing decisions, involving government, civil society, and the private sector to manage public affairs, ensuring accountability, transparency, and effectiveness in achieving societal goals, going beyond just the formal government to include interactions and networks. It's about steering society, defining acceptable conduct, and wielding authority through agreed-upon norms, values, and laws for collective well-being and resource management. Governance determines a society's capacity to deliver services, manage resources, ensure stability, and promote sustainable development, directly impacting citizen welfare and public trust. Accountability, transparency, rule of law, participation, responsiveness, equity and inclusiveness is the buzz words of governance.

Key Words: Governance, Accountability, Civil-society, Democratic, Politics, Economic interests, Development.

I. Introduction

The term 'governance' refers to the process of decision making and the ways in which decisions are implemented. In any given system, the government is the major actor, but others can influence the process. Civil society, institutions (political, financial, military) and community-based groups can play important roles in governance. Governance should ne participative, transparent, community oriented, accountable to the citizens and should be effective in

controlling the corruption. Governance should aim at establishing equitable and inclusive society through its 'good governance'. There are many multi and bilateral institutions that are concerned with promoting what they have termed as 'good governance' in post conflict and developing countries. Each of these institutions defines 'good governance' slightly differently and has developed its own indicators by which it measures and evaluates progress towards good governance. The World Bank, for instance has defined six indicators of good governance to help countries identify areas of weakness so that capacity building and assistance strategies are more effective. The indicators are: voice and accountability, political stability and lack of violence, governmental effectiveness, rule of law, control of corruption and regulatory quality. Governance can be best effective through interactive society democratic function of the civil society through maintaining a space between an individual and society where in delegating welfare activities to civil social levels where, it has been argued, citizens participation in and prioritization of development issues would be more readily available – a true platform of democratic politics. In this article we will try to explore that how governmental motives has been influenced by the economic forces of globalization and global commodities reduce the space between the government and citizen and makes a functionless democratic politics. It creates a alienation between civil society, people and the process of governance. Now government has tried to reduce the gap and make democracy more functionable through various steps of people's participation and through NITI Ayog where interaction with civil society can be more plausible.

II. Nature of Indian Polity and Society

Indians are compelled to live under the shadow of 'politics and are not capable to adopt themselves with the situation nor competing to change the society. But there are few who can confront the social forces with conscious actions in pursuit of a common social goal. These assumptions are common to our polity and society (Gramsci,1971, P.328).

First, consciously or unconsciously, we have accepted this fact that we have to adopt ourselves to the globalized world order, where a global economy can serve the domestic society better, accept and extend support to policies, which will allow the state to provide an ethos of competitiveness and make policies – economic, cultural and social – which are acceptable at the global level. In other words, we cannot get out of the 'globalization trap' because globalization today, it has been argued, is inevitable and unalterable (Jalal,1995, p.16).

Secondly, given the fact that globalization is essentially an economic process, which involves 'frictionless movement of money and commodities, the expensiveness and inventiveness of capitalism and market', we have no other alternative but to live in a society where economics and politics have been separated (Kaviraj,1999, p.78).

It has been stated repeatedly – and we, the common people have probably internalized it – the market is a panacea for all evils and the success and failure of institutions, actors or individuals can be measured in terms of profits which such agencies have made.

Politics in India (Grindly,2001, P.158-160) centered around the following: -

> ➢ How powerful economic interests influence and develop around such policies and offer resistance if the state tries to reduce some of the benefits.
> ➢ Distributional consequences of policy changes.
> ➢ How economic crisis like inflation, foreign exchange shortages, militant trade unionism have provided stimuli for reforms.
> ➢ Role of ideas and leadership in the process of change.

Failure and success of the state in extending benefits to its citizens will be replaced by studies regarding how the use of markets and invisible pricing mechanisms may create social and political inequality, legitimacy as well as accountability problematics vis – a vis the state system, rather than how they could help the citizens (Kohli,2001, p.92). Secondly, it appears under these circumstances, that the so-called 'market-state', or the 'button-pushing' state becomes indifferent towards all sorts of welfare activities and for that matter to the notions of social justice or any sort of moral values. The state can intervene if agents' actions act as impediments to economic competition (Mehta,2009, p.4-6). The solution lies in delegating welfare activities to civil social levels where, it has been argued, citizens participation in and prioritization of development issues would be more readily available.

III. Democratic Function of Civil Society

Two questions can be raised: first, under what condition is it possible for the state to provide help to the citizens in a supposedly democratic set-up, where legitimacy of the government depends, ideally speaking, on popular consent? How will the relationship between the state and citizens be recognized? Second, if civil society is viewed as a mechanism (Appadorai,1994, p.67) for reform from below and provides institutional device for popular participation, the question continues to be raised – will civil societal organizations act in a democratic fashion?

The following answers have been provided: first, it has been argued that the traditional command structure should be replaced by a non-hierarchical, network based, private-public oriented, knowledge-linked political system – it should be performance based, cost-effective, competitive, deregulated and market oriented (Chakroborty,1961, p.89). Second, it has been argued that a civil society creates a space between the individual and the state. People's demands are articulated and aggregated at this level and subsequently transmitted to the state. This should play an increasingly lesser role and individuals should act and identify their priorities in a self-reflected, interactive way, which may reshape the political dynamics of a given society.

Let us look at both these arguments in a critical way. Instead of any arrogant generalization, efforts will be made to identify certain trends, based on certain microlevel experiences. Every economic trend has its own political agenda – the contemporary phase of globalization is no exception to this general rule; under the present system, actors are viewed as self-interested, egoistic, utility maximizing units; success is determined in terms of economic profit maximization; and individuals become actors with little or no concern for the society as a whole. Once we transfer this assumption of an egoistic, self-centered (Roy,2005,p.42), utility maximizing economic individual to the political plane confront the possibility of a social order

where the state would be more interested in protecting the interests of the property owners, rather than of the marginalized sections.

IV. Governance with a Developmental Initiatives

Indian democracy, often described as the world's largest democracy, is a captivating mix of diversity, ideology, and governance. In a nation as vast and varied as India, the democratic framework is not just a political system; it's a way of life, an evolving experiment, and a testament to the aspirations of over a billion people. Exploring more about Indian democracy gives us a rich mosaic of traditions, ideas, and challenges that have shaped its evolution (World Brotherhood,1960, p.1-2). The journey of Indian democracy is a tale of relentless struggles, achievements, and the unceasing pursuit of a more equitable society. As college students, we must have a distinct perspective that allows us to assess both its limitations and potential. Governance in India is a federal parliamentary democracy with three branches (legislature, executive, judiciary) and three tiers (Central, State, Local), rooted in the Constitution, evolving towards good governance. 'Governance' and not government, is the buzzword today. The World Bank in its World Development Report (1994) has identified the following features of governance, transparency, professionalism, accountability, poplar participation, equality and rule of law.

In its 1994 report, World Development Report 1994: Infrastructure for Development, the World Bank focused on governance as the process of exercising power to manage a country's economic and social resources for development, highlighting key elements like Public Sector Management, Accountability, the Legal Framework for Development, and Transparency and Information, aiming for efficient service delivery through better incentives, rules, and institutions (World Bank Report,1994).

World Bank's Governance Definition & Focus (1994):

- **Broad Definition:** "The manner in which power is exercised in the administration and management of a country's economic and social resources for growth and development".

- **Key Focus Areas** (from the 1992 report, elaborated in 1994):

  1. Public Sector Management: Improving organizational structures, budgeting, and performance incentives for public enterprises and agencies.
  2. Accountability: Ensuring governments and their employees are responsible for their actions.
  3. Legal Framework for Development: Establishing predictable and stable rules for economic activity and business.
  4. Transparency and Information: Providing access to information to understand decision-making, reinforcing accountability.

- Core Concern: The Bank's interest stems from ensuring sustainable development, requiring predictable rules, strong institutions, and responsive public services, shifting towards private sector involvement and better performance incentives.

Essentially, the Bank linked good governance to creating an environment where economic policies could succeed, emphasizing efficient resource use and improved public services through better management and accountability.

This report says that the main purposes of governance are to protect private property for smooth functioning of the market system; to initiate a regulatory system so that the bases of economic competition get strengthened to initiate a regulatory system so that the bases of economic competition get strengthened to adopt strong economic measures for strengthening the foundation of the market economy, and to eliminate corruption for securing legitimacy from the people. Neither is the introduction of a governance structure capable of ensuring smooth capitalist development a novel innovation, nor can one guarantee that such a deregulated, profit maximizing, network-based system will either be a victim of or be a supporter of sectarian partial and narrow power bases (Gramsci, Antonio,1971, p.326). As long as one talks of governance structure, aimed at achieving profit maximization, one may not be too worried. But the moment one starts ensuring citizens participation, accountability and rule of law, a different problematic arises. With the introduction of the concept of 'democratization', the whole idea changes. It is true that we have a long tradition of democratic practices – but that is more at a collective level, rather than at an individual level. We surely periodically cast our votes, but to meet our elected representatives is obviously an experience to be remembered throughout one's life. Individuals generally hold high expectations of their political institutions, but if decisions are taken in an elite club and political institutions become simply rubber stamps for formalizing such decisions, citizens would surely feel themselves cheated and deprived of their democratic entitlements (Varshney,1995, p.13-17). Citizens can hardly do anything as they appear to be the part of a vast, alienated population which does not know what to do when political institutions disrespect and derecognize the civility of such individuals. One can talk about democratic governance, human governance in the cozy air-conditioned seminar rooms, but the irony remains that 'decision-making' is still carried out in relatively closed contexts and reflect the actions of elites within the government rather the pressures of civil society on the government or on political officials (Grindly. Merilee.S, 2001, p.161).

In this context, a few problematics are worth mentioning: First, it seems that the concept of governance encompasses not only government but includes other channels through which command flows in the form of goals formulated, directions used and policies pursued. There appears to be collective steering, coordination and control mechanisms, embracing a multilayered character and involving both private and public authorities. How can such a structure assume democratic character whereby respect for human rights and dignity is recognized, principles of empowerment, accountability, gender equality, non-discrimination, sustainability, poverty eradication are ensured, inclusive and fair rules, institutions and practices would govern social interactions, and popular needs and social aspirations (ibid)would be reflected in the formulation of socio-economic policies?

Secondly, one also confronts a few paradoxes in our democratic setup: one, why does the state constantly talk about transparency, but acts inevitably, and probably deliberately, in non-transparent manners? Two, why does a state which apparently commits itself towards people's participation, empowerment and equality, but tends to reinforce isolationism among

individuals through exclusionary practices, discipline them through its ideological apparatuses and punish them if individuals adopt a critical and emancipatory approach? Three, why does a state which gives up its welfare activities in the name of market economy, separate economic activities and political initiatives, but rarely hesitates to intervene on behalf of the economically dominant sections of society, and measures success or failures of institutions and actors in terms of the profit they have made? We probably have no hesitation in accepting the state as it is if it is clear enough about its traditional agenda that is protection of private property by any name, including application of repressive measures over which it has exclusive monopoly. But we should not be hesitant to call it 'corrupt' if it tries to reverse our age-old notions of the state by projecting itself as the savior of the ordinary people through high sounding ideals and 'grand narratives', but acts in a subtle way to impose a regime of exclusion and silence.

It seems that the Indian state has been vacillating between two types of governance – corporate governance where profit maximization appears to be the exclusive motivation with least and probably no concern for community aspirations and human dignity, and democratic governance which emphasizes human rights, empowerment, sustainability, equity etc. In which direction will the polity shift? How will the balance between the two be ensured? In fact, 'the convergence of mafia capitalism and multinational corporate practice, is simply a development of the autistic undercurrent in capitalism into an institutionalized criminality' (Couza.Venn, 2006).

V. Modern Initiatives and Reforms of Governance (2025)

India's modern governance initiatives in 2025 focus on **digital transformation, economic reforms, social welfare, and administrative efficiency**, with an overarching goal of achieving "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India) by 2047 (www.nitiayog.in). These reforms emphasize technology, transparency, and citizen-centric services. Key initiatives in 2025 include:

   a) **Digital Governance & E-Governance**

- **e-Governance Plan (NeGP):** Continued implementation of the National e-Governance Plan, which includes platforms like Digi-Locker, UMANG, and MyGov.in, to deliver government services online (ibid).

- **National Conference on e-Governance:** The 28th National Conference on e-Governance adopted the "Visakhapatnam Declaration" to further digital governance using AI and other emerging technologies.

- **AI Integration:** The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) launched an AI-powered Recruitment Rules Generator and AI-enabled features on the iGOT Karmayogi platform for capacity building of civil servants.

- **Aadhaar Integration:** The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) enabled Aadhaar-based authentication for cooperative banks to expedite eKYC and facilitate direct benefit transfers, expanding financial inclusion in rural areas.

- **Digital Studio "Shrishti":** Launched at the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) to create high-quality digital learning content for government functionaries.

b) Economic and Sectoral Reforms

- **Tax and GST Reforms:** Significant overhauls to the income-tax structure to stimulate consumption and a radical restructuring of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) were undertaken to simplify compliance and reduce bureaucratic hurdles.

- **"SHANTI" Bill:** The Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill was passed to open the nuclear energy sector to private players and diversify India's energy mix.

- **Modernizing Ports:** The Indian Ports Bill, 2025 was passed to replace outdated legislation, introduce digitalization through a Maritime Single Window, and standardize port management across states (ibid).

- **Jan Vishwas Bill (Amendment):** This bill expanded decriminalization of minor offences across various acts to improve the ease of doing business and reduce the judicial workload.

c) Social Welfare and Inclusive Development

- **National Cooperation Policy 2025:** A strategic roadmap focusing on legal reforms, digitalization, and financial empowerment to make cooperatives key drivers for national development, with a focus on inclusivity for women, youth, SC/STs.

- **Adi Karmayogi Abhiyan:** Launched by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, this program is designed to train and empower two million tribal grassroots leaders to participate in co-designing governance and development plans (ibid).

- **Entrepreneurship Development for Transgender Persons:** A program initiated by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to provide skill training and financial literacy, with a focus on financial inclusion through priority sector lending.

- **National Sports Policy (NSP) 2025:** Approved by the Union Cabinet to strengthen sports from grassroots to elite levels, incorporating talent identification and infrastructure development.

d) Performance Measurement

- **Good Governance Index (GGI):** This diagnostic tool developed by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances continues to measure governance performance across 10 sectors and 58 indicators, promoting evidence-based reforms and competitive governance among states (ibid).

- **Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore:** A nationwide campaign conducted during Good Governance Week, involving thousands of camps in over 700 districts to ensure grievance redressal and service delivery at the grassroots level.

VI. NITI Ayog – New Path for Governance Initiatives

NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India) is India's premier policy think tank, driving governance by fostering **cooperative federalism**, providing strategic advice, and promoting innovation for national development, acting as a platform for states to collaborate on goals like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through indices, data-driven insights, and capacity building, moving beyond incremental changes to systemic reform for a citizen-centric, developed India by 2047 (www.nitiayog.in).

a) Key Roles in Governance

- **Think Tank & Policy Vision**: Offers strategic and technical advice to central and state governments, shaping long-term policy.
- **Cooperative Federalism Platform**: Unites states as "Team India" to work on shared goals, involving them in policymaking.
- **Competitive Federalism**: Encourages healthy competition among states through performance rankings (e.g., Health Index, SDG Index, Innovation Index) to drive improvement (ibid).
- **SDG Implementation**: The nodal agency for monitoring and achieving India's Sustainable Development Goals, localizing them for effective impact.
- **Capacity Building**: Focuses on upgrading technology, strengthening institutions, and building capacity for efficient public service delivery.
- **Data & Monitoring**: Develops indices and dashboards (like the SDG India Index) to track progress and inform policy (ibid).

b) Core Functions & Approach

- **Bottom-Up Approach**: Involves states in policy formulation.
- **Long-Term Vision**: Works towards making India a developed nation by 2047 through systemic reforms.
- **Inter-Sectoral Coordination**: Addresses cross-cutting issues and aligns different ministries and states (ibid).

c) Governance Structure

- **Governing Council**: Chaired by the Prime Minister, includes all Chief Ministers and Lt Governors, discussing major policy issues (ibid).

- **Governance & Reforms Division**: A dedicated division focused on systemic transformation, regulatory simplification, and fostering innovation in public service.

VII. Conclusion

Democracy is a mirror where one can clearly see the truth but the mirror also serves as a door to that darkroom just behind it where our chosen representatives are free to take decisions to serve their personal interests to acquire power and property of the people in the name of the people. The representatives are doing so by continuously hammering the minds of its people with their own dreams and desires through promises, planning, theories, concerns, inquiries, and commissions that ultimately take the images on the mirror of democracy as our own,

painted by our rulers in the disguise of servants. However, this scenario can be changed if the citizens take effective participation, fulfill obligations, and hold public authorities accountable for their actions. with all the initial lacunas Indian democracy could survive and operationalize itself in a successful way. The reasons for its success are its internal mechanisms rather than outside or international pressure. So, a country with all its diversities and lack of pre- requisite conditions can sustain and succeed in its democracy, if people of the country willfully accept democratic state.

Two conclusions follow: first, the future of democracy in India will depend on the conflict between two forms of governance already mentioned. Second, the moment civil society internalizes the norms of exclusion and inclusion, silencing dissent, legitimizing dishonesty, subverting morality, destroying human values and projecting domination as normal, the whole nation of democratization will be a myth (Venn Couxa,2006). Such processes are the inevitable products of an uncivil society. The moment these features are incorporated in a society, they become fixed features of life and get institutionalized – the moment one recognizes that one has destroyed the whole foundation of democracy. Surely we find frustrations in this set up but beneath the surface thee lies faith in the possibility of transformation towards abstract civility and a corruption free society – India government is already in that path to achieve true democratic state "driving governance by fostering cooperative federalism"(www.nitiayog.in).

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