Democratic deficit: Addressing the issues and challenges of Indian Democracy

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Abstract : Indian democracy is one of the largest and most diverse in the world, characterized by regular elections, with a multi-party system, and a robust constitution that guarantees fundamental rights to its citizens. India, often referred to as the Mother of Democracy, stands as an outstanding example for democratic ideals and values in the world. The foundational principles of Indian democracy have evolved over centuries, drawing from ancient cultural and philosophical roots. India adopted parliamentary form of government since its independence and faced several challenges to rebuild its system on the basis of Democratic principles. But since few decades India is experiencing Democratic deficits. The social and religious polarization is fuelled by various factors, including identity politics, historical grievances, economic disparities, and external influences. It manifests in communal tensions, intolerance, and the marginalization of certain groups based on religion, caste, or ethnicity.This polarization poses a threat to the foundational principles of democracy, such as secularism, pluralism, and social cohesion. It undermines the unity and diversity that are integral to India's democratic fabric, leading to political divisiveness, violence, and the erosion of trust in institutions. Addressing this challenge requires fostering dialogue, promoting understanding, and strengthening social cohesion through inclusive policies, education, and community engagement. It also necessitates political leadership that prioritizes national unity over narrow sectarian interests and works towards building consensus across diverse groups for the greater common good.

Keywords : Democracy, Democratic deficit, Diversity, Political divisiveness, Common good

1. Introduction

Democracy has deeply rooted history in Indian history and societal values since time immemorial. Democratic principles has been integral part of the Indian subcontinent for ages.

The relationship between rulers and the ruled is often likened to that of a father and progeny. The concept of Dharma (duty) plays a crucial role, encompassing the obligations of both the king (*Raja Dharma*) and the people (*Praja Dharma*). Our democracy's core values include social harmony, equality, peaceful coexistence, freedom of thought, universal brotherhood principles underpin citizens' dignified lives. Early democratic processes in India saw women actively participating in assemblies, emphasizing inclusivity. Ancient Indian scriptures, such as the Rigveda, proclaim: *"Ekam Sad Vipra Bahudha Vadanti"*—meaning "The Supreme Reality is One, and sages call Him by various names." This highlights the essence of equality, which is the soul of democracy. India's democratic legacy of core values continues to shape enduring democratic principles guided by Dharma. As we celebrate India's rich heritage, we recognize that its ancient democratic ideals resonate even in the modern world. India got freedom from colonial British rule in 1947 and embraced a political system based on government is ruled by the consent of people. India framed its own constitution which came in to force in 1950. Indian political system is shaped and guided by the supreme law of the land, the Constitution of India. India encountered numerous challenges overtime to construct a powerful socio-economic model. Today India is one among top global countries yet it's not free from challenges. India's democracy faces several challenges, including corruption, social inequality, religious and ethnic tensions, political polarization, bureaucratic inefficiency, and issues related to freedom of speech and press. Additionally, there are concerns about electoral integrity, with issues such as money power, criminalization of politics, and voter manipulation. Ensuring inclusive governance, combating corruption, protecting minority rights, and strengthening institutions are crucial for addressing these challenges and safeguarding India's democratic values.

1.1 Objectives of the study :

- ❖ To understand the foundation of Indian political system
- ❖ To discerning the reasons for Democratic deficit
- ❖ To find out possible solutions to address the challenges of Democratic deficits

2. Does India face Democratic deficit?

Democratic deficit refers to a situation where there is a perceived lack of democratic legitimacy, accountability, and responsiveness in a political system or institution. It occurs when there is a gap between the democratic ideals and the actual functioning of governance.

This deficit can manifest in various ways, such as limited citizen participation in decision-making, insufficient transparency and accountability in government actions, concentration of power in unelected bodies or elites, and disregard for minority rights. In essence, it reflects shortcomings in the democratic process and institutions that undermine the principles of democracy. Despite being the world's largest democracy, there are concerns about issues such as limited citizen participation in decision-making processes, instances of corruption, challenges to press freedom, bureaucratic inefficiency, and sometimes inadequate responsiveness of government institutions to the needs of the population. Additionally, there are concerns about the influence of money and muscle power in elections, as well as the presence of criminal elements in politics. However, it's worth noting that India also has a vibrant civil society, a free and active media, and periodic elections that contribute to its democratic resilience. Addressing these challenges remains crucial for strengthening India's democratic fabric.

2.1 Structure of Indian Polity :

The Indian political system has woven from its past history, traditions constitutional and democratic values. India has a quasi-federal parliamentary form of democratic set up. The fundamental law of the land, the Indian Constitution, shapes the present structure of the political system. It outlines the rights, duties, and principles that govern the nation. It comprises three branches. Executive Branch headed by the President of India, the Prime Minister as the head of government, and the Council of Ministers. Legislative Branch is consists of the Parliament of India, which is bicameral, The Rajyasabha the upper house with members appointed by the President and elected by the state legislatures. The Loksabha, the lower house with members elected by the people through general elections. Judicial Branch consists The Supreme Court of India is the highest judicial body, overseeing the legal system and ensuring the constitutionality of laws and governmental actions. Additionally, India has a multi-tiered system of government with states and union territories, each with its own legislature and government. Overall, the Indian political system is designed to ensure a balance of power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, as well as between the central and state governments, to uphold democratic principles and govern a diverse and vast nation. The people of India enjoy fundamental and civil rights that empowers the people of India to participate in

the democratic process, express themselves freely, seek justice, and live a dignified life. However, it's essential to note that ensuring the effective enjoyment of these rights requires ongoing efforts to address socio-economic disparities, discrimination, and other challenges faced by various segments of society.

2.2 Core values of democracy :

The core values of democracy typically include principles such as equality, freedom, justice, rule of law, individual rights, social justice, transparency, accountability, good governance and respect for diversity and human dignity. These values serve as the foundation for democratic societies, guiding their political systems, institutions, and policies.

Equality: Democracy emphasizes the equal worth and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their background, race, gender, religion, or socioeconomic status. It ensures that every citizen has an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and to enjoy the benefits of society.

Freedom: Democracy promotes the freedom of speech, expression, assembly, and religion. Citizens have the right to voice their opinions, criticize the government, and participate in public discourse without fear of repression or censorship.

Justice: Democracy seeks to establish a system of justice where laws are fair, impartial, and applied equally to all members of society. It upholds the principle of due process and protects individuals' rights against arbitrary actions by the government or other individuals.

Rule of Law: Democracy operates under the rule of law, meaning that no one, including government officials, is above the law. Laws are enacted through a democratic process, are publicly known, and are enforced consistently and impartially.

Individual Rights: Democracy safeguards the fundamental rights and liberties of individuals, such as the right to life, liberty, and property, as well as freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and religion. These rights are protected from infringement by both the government and fellow citizens.

Transparency: Democracy promotes transparency in government actions and decision-making processes. It requires openness, accountability, and accessibility of information to the public, allowing citizens to monitor the conduct of their elected representatives and hold them accountable for their actions.

Accountability: Democracy holds elected officials accountable to the electorate through regular elections, mechanisms for oversight, and checks and balances within government institutions. Public officials are responsible for their actions and decisions and can be removed from office if they fail to uphold their duties or violate the public trust.

Respect for Diversity and Human Dignity: Democracy celebrates diversity and respects the inherent dignity and worth of every individual. It acknowledges the importance of tolerance, inclusivity, and understanding among people with different backgrounds, beliefs, and perspectives.

These core values are interrelated and form the basis for a democratic society that promotes the well-being and flourishing of its citizens while upholding principles of justice, equality, and freedom.

Table No. 1. India's global Ranking in Different Indexes

Sl. No	Name of the survey	Index name	India's Ranking	Survey year
1.	Democracy Index	Economist Intelligence Unit	41	2023
2.	Human Development Index	United Nations Development Programme	134	2023
3.	Corruption Perception Index	Transparency International	93	2023
4.	Global Peace Index	Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP)	126	2023
5.	Global Hunger Index	Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe	111	2023
6.	World Press Freedom Index	Reporters Without Borders	161	2023
7	Electoral Democracy Index	V- Dem Democracy report	108	2023

According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2023, India ranked 93rd out of 180 countries, which was 85th in 2022 indicating a moderate level of perceived corruption. Corruption has been a longstanding issue in various sectors, including politics, bureaucracy, and business. India's rank in the World Press Freedom Index varies annually. In the 2023 index compiled by Reporters Without Borders, India was ranked 108th out of 180

countries, indicating a significant level of restrictions and challenges faced by journalists in the country. While India conducts regular elections and has a high voter turnout, there have been concerns about the influence of money, muscle power, and criminal elements in politics. According to data from the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), a significant number of politicians have criminal cases pending against them[1]. In 2019 Loksabha election 233 MP's have Criminal Cases against them. Despite having a large and diverse population, there are challenges in ensuring meaningful citizen participation in decision-making processes at various levels of governance. Limited access to information, bureaucratic hurdles, and socio-economic disparities hinder the effective engagement of citizens in governance. India is a diverse country with numerous religious, ethnic, and linguistic minorities. Ensuring the protection of minority rights, including freedom of religion and prevention of discrimination, remains a challenge, with instances of communal tensions and violence reported in certain regions.

3. Exploring the reasons for Democratic deficit :

The democratic deficit in India can be attributed to several factors:

➢ **Corruption**: Corruption permeates various levels of government and undermines democratic institutions, eroding public trust and hindering effective governance. Widespread corruption undermines democratic principles and distorts the allocation of resources.

➢ **Weak Governance**: Inefficiency, bureaucracy, and redtapism can hinder the effective implementation of democratic processes and policies, leading to a sense of disenchantment among citizens.

➢ **Political Dynasties:** The prevalence of political dynasties can create a sense of nepotism and limit opportunities for new and diverse voices to enter the political arena.

➢ **Social and Economic Inequality**: Disparities in wealth, education, and access to resources can inhibit the participation of marginalized communities in the democratic process, leading to unequal representation.

➢ **Limited Civic Participation**: Despite India's large population, civic engagement and participation in political processes remain relatively low, diminishing the vibrancy of democratic discourse and accountability.

- **Lack of Political Accountability**: Weak mechanisms for holding politicians and government officials accountable for their actions can perpetuate a culture of impunity and diminish the responsiveness of elected representatives to the needs of the people.

- **Fragmented Political Landscape**: The presence of numerous political parties with diverse agendas and ideologies can lead to fragmented governance and hinder consensus-building, making it challenging to address pressing issues effectively.

- **Media Influence:** Media bias, sensationalism, and lack of diversity in ownership can distort public discourse and influence electoral outcomes, undermining the democratic ideal of informed decision-making.

- **Electoral Irregularities**: Issues such as voter fraud, manipulation, and the use of money power during elections can undermine the fairness and integrity of the electoral process.

Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from various stakeholders, including government, civil society, media, and citizens, to strengthen democratic institutions, promote transparency, and ensure inclusivity and equity in the democratic process. Political reforms aimed at promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in India's democratic institutions and processes.

3.1 Measures to encounter the Democratic deficit :

To address the democratic deficit in India, several measures can be implemented:

- **Anti-corruption Measures:** Strengthening anti-corruption laws, establishing independent anti-corruption bodies, and promoting transparency in government transactions can help curb corruption and restore public trust in democratic institutions. The Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Ordinance, 2021 has amended the Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003.which was formed to deal with corrupt practices under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.

- **Electoral Reforms:** Introducing measures such as state funding of elections, stricter enforcement of campaign finance laws, and electoral reforms to promote internal democracy within political parties can enhance the integrity of the electoral process. Election Commission of India founded under article 324 of the constitution of India to

conduct timely free and fair election[2]. It has to be powerful to check the criminal elements entering into the political system. Representation of Peoples Act, 1951 is a strong tool to deal with corrupt practices and other offences related to election.

➤ **Promotion of Political Accountability**: Implementing mechanisms such as recall elections, citizen oversight committees, and robust mechanisms for grievance redressal can enhance political accountability and ensure that elected representatives are held accountable for their actions.

➤ **Empowerment of Marginalized Communities**: Promoting affirmative action policies, enhancing access to education and healthcare, and ensuring adequate representation of marginalized communities in decision-making bodies can help address social and economic inequalities and promote inclusive governance.

➤ **Strengthening Institutions:** Strengthening independent institutions such as the judiciary, election commission, and anti-corruption agencies can bolster checks and balances, uphold the rule of law, and prevent the abuse of power.

➤ **Promoting Civic Education and Participation:** Promoting civic education programs, fostering a culture of political engagement, and enhancing avenues for citizen participation in decision-making processes can empower citizens to actively participate in democratic governance.

➤ **Media Reform**: Implementing measures to promote media pluralism, ensure editorial independence, and combat misinformation can enhance the role of the media as a watchdog and promote informed public discourse.

➤ **Decentralization of Power:** Promoting decentralization of power through effective devolution of authority to local governments and grassroots organizations can enhance citizen participation, promote responsive governance, and address local needs more effectively

4. Conclusion

Finally, it can be can be concluded that Democratic deficits refer to shortcomings or deficiencies within a democratic system that undermine its effectiveness or legitimacy. These deficits can manifest in various forms and can occur at different levels of government and

society. Addressing the democratic deficit in India is crucial to uphold the principles of democracy, ensure effective governance, and promote social cohesion. It involves implementing measures such as combating corruption, promoting political accountability, empowering marginalized communities, strengthening institutions, fostering civic participation, reforming the media landscape, and decentralizing power. By addressing the democratic deficit, India can enhance public trust in democratic institutions, promote inclusive governance, and foster sustainable development for all citizens. Upholding democratic values and practices enhances India's credibility and standing in the international community, reinforcing its reputation as a responsible global actor committed to democratic principles. Implementation of these measures is crucial to counter the democratic deficit and strengthen its democratic foundations for inclusive and sustainable development. By addressing these deficits, democratic systems can become more robust, inclusive, and responsive to the needs and aspirations of all citizens.

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