



# Challenges to Indian Democracy: Analyzing Through the Lens of Human Security

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## Abstract

The ideological conflicts that prevailed in the ancient society led to the development of many forms of political institutions and democracy is one such, which can be traced back to antiquity. Since ancient times, democracy has meant rule by the people. However, in modern times, democracy is a mixture of this ancient idea with individual liberty and human rights alongside it. Generally, democracy means rule by the people to ensure that every citizen takes part in the decision-making process either directly or indirectly through elected representatives. India is the largest democracy in the world. In the last more than 7 decades, it has worked successfully well to some extent. But today's modern India has to face many challenges that need to be tackled to ensure true democracy. These challenges may include social and economic inequalities, poverty and unemployment, human insecurity, illiteracy and ignorance, casteism, multiculturalism, communalism, population explosion, regionalism, corruption, and terrorism, etc. India needs to develop new proposals to reform democracy. Laws play important role in political reformation and may help to prevent wrong practices and encourage good ones. But mere legal changes alone do not help as the changes in laws may sometimes prove counterproductive and may negatively impact society. Therefore, the best laws empower people to carry out democratic reforms. The Right to Information Act is the best example that serves as a watchdog against the abuse of democratic principles. The challenges to democracy may be tackled by way of movements of activists or by politically conscious citizens. Some of the measures that can be taken to sustain a true parliamentary democracy in India include: achieving 100% literacy; educating the masses about democratic rights; ensuring better protection of fundamental rights, and ensuring freedom of the press, etc. Moreover, democracy means that political institutions with democratic processes and every Indian citizen are to be democratic, reflecting basic democratic values of equality, liberty, fraternity, secularism, and justice in the social environment and individual behavior. At present democracy is being murdered by its own supporters like citizens and representatives simultaneously. The purpose of this article is to attempt an analysis of the problems and obstacles that the Indian democracy now faces, which has, of course, led to human insecurity as a whole, and to offer the required changes in order to guarantee that democracy in India can survive in the long term.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Human insecurity, Secularism, Corruption, Equality, Illiteracy, Casteism



## Introduction

In the modern era, democracy has shown to be the best form of governance because of the way it prioritizes widespread citizen engagement. India is considered to be one of the ardent participants of democracy, and when it comes to its history, the world's largest democracy, India, has a very short track record. India's lengthy affiliation with the British as part of the British Raj led it astray towards democracy. Numerous changes were made to it. Caste, regionalism, linguistic variations, and religious plurality are all examples of India's distinctive social makeup. Democracies in India were generally established against a backdrop of social struggle, both violent and quiet.<sup>1</sup> When we talk about the Indian democratic framework it reflects that for over 75 years, citizens have been able to freely exercise their rights to vote in elections, travel freely, and worship as they like, and there have been no major disruptions in the transition of power at either the federal or state levels. The economy and society of India have also been expanding and changing. At the same time, we frequently hear people gripe about the systemic unfairness, inequality, and failure to meet the needs of certain groups in our society. These individuals lack confidence in their ability to contribute to the democratic process. In present-day Indian democracy, it is very difficult to understand the politics of India due to the fact that fresh political identities continue to develop alongside old ones. The coexistence of violent social strife and democratic politics gives birth to the 'Indian Paradox.'<sup>2</sup>

Democracy in India means that all political institutions and democratic processes must be democratic and that every citizen must act in a manner that reflects the fundamental democratic values of equality, liberty, fraternity, secularism, and justice in their interactions with one another and with society. If we look at it from another angle, we can say that anything is an authentic democracy only when it satisfies both the political and socio-economic components of people's involvement and satisfaction. Because of this, it is necessary for them to create a constitution and laws that give the people absolute authority over the government.<sup>3</sup>

## The Current State of Indian Democracy

India is the biggest democracy in the world, which has taken giant strides in the last few decades. We are now the world's third-largest economy (in purchasing power parity terms). However, being an Indian you can't resist the 'chalta hai' (let it be) common attitude. Moreover, for everything we have 'jugaad'. But in between this, we cannot forget everyday issues, which continue to pose hurdles in the progress of the nation. These social, political and economic issues are meant to be taken into consideration, in order to improve the prevailing condition of our society. When all citizens have a voice in policymaking, either directly or through their elected representatives, we say that we live in a democracy. In terms of population, India has the most functioning democracy on the planet. The previous 7 decades have seen a degree of success. However, several obstacles exist in modern India that must be overcome if democracy is to flourish in a true sense. Overpopulation, poverty, the wealth gap, lack of sanitation, corruption, illiteracy, the right to education, communal, religious, etc., violence, terrorism, Naxalism, caste-related violence, law and order, economic reforms, good governance, voter turnout, relations with neighbouring countries, diplomatic issues, the protection of human rights, the rights of women and children, and the right to development are all potential obstacles. India's democratic system requires new legal, political, and social proposals to establish an egalitarian social order.<sup>4</sup> Understanding both the theoretical

underpinnings of democracy and its day-to-day workings is essential to participating in the democratic discourse in India, which brings together two crucial components of the topic at hand. In this paper, I make some observations about the problems in Indian democracy that threaten human existence as a whole, and I try to give a formulation of what exactly one is looking at when considering the challenges that Indian democracy confronts in comparison to those that undemocratic systems face. I argue the real challenge for Indian democracy what I call the gap between theory and practice. The question that we need to ask does contemporary Indian democracy produce an outcome that all citizens can accept. Look, despite its flaws, democracy is a political system that seeks to treat its people fairly and with dignity. Even while there is a lot of discussion over whether or not democracy helps or hinders development, there is less disagreement that the desire for democracy is essential to progress. Central to the development aspiration is the recognition of people's social position as citizens rather than subjects, the expansion of people's rights and freedoms to define their own lives, the protection of people from the exercise of arbitrary power, and the making of government accountable through greater participation of the governed. These ideals find expression in the kind of governance known as a representative constitutional democracy. Yet in practice, the actual functioning of democracy in India often honors the promise of accountability only in its breach. <sup>5</sup>

### **The Conundrum in Indian Democracy**

India may have evolved more than any other nation in terms of science and technology, but the unfortunate truth is that in terms of social conditions, economic conditions, and cultural practices, we lag well behind any and all other nations of the world. A prominent philosopher named Bentham once said that governments will have to take in the happiness of the greatest number of people when making decisions about governance. However, this idea has since been proven to be a fallacy. India has a history of democracy, tolerance, and rule of law dating long back years; the country has been able to successfully manage its multicultural variety, and its Constitution enshrines neutrality as a fundamental value. However, this state of affairs is increasingly being called into question because of the expanding influence of various issues and challenges on Indian society and politics which eventually posed threat to human security. A lot has changed in India. Still, the country faces many problems when it comes to meeting the expectations of different parts of society. The problems come from both domestic and international situations and from the fact that democracy doesn't have all the things it needs to work well. The problems or challenges of Indian Democracy are as follows; -

#### **1. Illiteracy**

On the eve of India's independence, widespread illiteracy posed a serious threat to the country's fledgling democracy and remains so today. The health of a democracy and the growth of its economy depends on the degree of education of its population. Additionally, it is necessary for maintaining human worth. When India finally gained its freedom, however, the country's literacy rate was abysmally low. The literacy rate in 1951 was a mere 18.33 per cent and female literacy was negligible with 8.9 per cent. Many feared that the citizens would not be able to play their roles effectively and exercise their right to vote meaningfully, which is an individual's expression of the power of the people. Literacy is necessary not simply for enabling citizens to participate in elections and exercise their right to vote effectively, it has other important implications as well. Literacy enables citizens to be aware of various issues,

problems, demands, and interests in the country. It also makes them conscious of the principles of liberty and equality of all and ensures that the representatives elected by them truly represent all the interests in society. Universal literacy is, therefore, a must for the successful functioning of Indian democracy. Although according to the 2011 Census, the literacy rate has risen to 74.04 per cent, the female literacy rate is still lagging at 65.46 per cent. This means that over one-fourth of the country's population is still illiterate while among women nearly one out of three is not literate.

## **2. Poverty**

For a hungry individual, voting has no value. He/she needs nourishment first. Poverty is democracy's biggest threat. It causes all deprivations and disparities. It's the rejection of healthy, fulfilling life opportunities. India inherited poverty from British colonialism, yet it remains a major issue today. Poverty in India destroys the equality necessary for democratic participation in three ways – one, it makes the poor more likely to give up their vote in exchange for respite from poverty; two, it allows the wealthy – due to the income inequality – to buy excessive influence; three, poor people are unable to access institutions to remedy inequality. The population below the poverty level in India fell from 37% in 2004-2005 to 22% in 2011-12. (Planning Commission data). 1 in 5 Indians (22%) lived in extreme poverty in 2011-12. This number is anticipated to drop to 5% by 2022, citing World Poverty Clock. Indian villages are home to 80% of the poor people. Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and Chhattisgarh have poor areas. 43% of the poor belong to Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe categories, as per World Bank statistics (2016). This disparity needs the immediate attention of the government.<sup>6</sup>

India was ranked 132 out of 192 countries in the world by the Human Development Report 2022 of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

## **3. Gender Discrimination**

Girls and women face discrimination everywhere. You've seen gender imbalance in our society and polity. Gender equality is a democratic principle. The Indian Constitution mandates that men and women be treated equally and that women are not discriminated against. Fundamental Rights and Duties and State Policy Directives make these intentions explicit. Politics has long been a male bastion in which women have yet to gain an equal footing. Even when women leaders overcome significant obstacles to enter electoral politics, they are continuously discouraged by misogynistic attitudes and character assassination. Women are routinely demotivated by being told that they do not belong here, and are systematically kept out of politics and decision-making. Empirical studies confirm women's skewed gender representation in politics and legislation. According to an Inter-Parliamentary Union study, India ranks 149th out of 193 countries in terms of female representation in the lower or single house of Parliament. It is inexcusable that in a country where women account for half of the population, they have an abysmally low 14% representation in the Lok Sabha and 11% in the Rajya Sabha. Is this what we mean when we say India is a 'representative democracy'? Why are their voices still marginalized, even though they constitute a sizeable proportion of the population? It is high time that we stop representing women and speaking on their behalf and give them every opportunity to speak for and represent themselves. Because of the prevalence of patriarchal tendencies and rampant sexism in political parties and institutions, an institutional process for ensuring the representation of women in legislation is

critical. The lack of women's active participation in politics not only undermines the spirit and idea of representative democracy but also denies women equal status and opportunity, as guaranteed by our Constitution.<sup>7</sup> Issues like domestic violence, rape, the portrayal of women in media, etc., must be tackled immediately.

#### **4. Casteism**

The caste system, which started in ancient labor division, has become a rigorous birth-based group classification. Have you experienced caste? Untouchability, which continues despite a constitutional ban, is the caste system's most harmful and inhumane element. This has led to the segregation of low castes or 'Dalits,' denying them schooling and other benefits. Dalits have always done menial and physically demanding jobs. Casteism has hurt democratic politics. Casteism exploits caste consciousness for narrow political interests. Caste is anti-democratic. The democratic amenities, such as equality, freedom of speech, expression, and association, participation in the electoral process, free media and press, and legislative forums, are utilized to sustain casteist identity. Casteism perpetuates socioeconomic inequality. India has always been uneven. SCs, STs, and backward castes have faced socioeconomic degradation for centuries. Huge inequities threaten Indian democracy. More frightening is the mingling of caste and politics in contemporary Indian polity, which threatens our democracy. Caste consciousness has not dissolved in our society, and castes are being employed as vote banks.<sup>8</sup> Today the worst form of terrorism in the Indian context is the caste system as it is deeply rooted in our society.

#### **5. Communalism**

Communalism is another serious problem facing Indian society today. There is religious fanaticism everywhere in India and thousands of people have been killed and property worth crores of rupees destroyed. Communalism has become the single most important ideology in contemporary India. Our society appears prone to continuing communal violence with the potential for political destabilization. Communalism is an affront to India's nationalist identity and a tragic setback to our secular culture. 13 Constitutionally India is a secular state. It means the Indian State has nothing to do with religion. People can freely exercise their religious rituals. The state will not do anything in favour of any religious group. After the 42nd constitutional amendment of India, the term 'secular' was added to the preamble of the Indian Constitution. Religion has become an important instrument for the Indian Government to win the political game.<sup>9</sup> All political parties are the same. They are the same in nature. BJP, TMCP, Congress etc.) All are playing their religious game. Minority religious people are not secure in India. Indian State should treat equally. But this is not happening in reality. So, it is a major challenge that Indian democracy is facing.

#### **6. Corruption**

It's no secret that corruption in public office is a huge problem in India. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, India placed 85<sup>th</sup> out of 180 nations in 2021. (CPI) and cites the India case as "Particularly Worrying". Its shows how corruption is engrossed in Indian society. Corruption is pervasive in every sector of society, from the acquisition and management of the real estate to healthcare to education to business to transportation to the police and the military and even to



sites ostensibly dedicated to spiritual practice. Both overt and subtle forms of corruption persist at the political, bureaucratic, and business levels. Corruption and corrupt activities have resulted from the connections between politicians, bureaucrats, and business owners. Judiciary is just another branch of government that corruption has spread its tentacles throughout. Though most of us are concerned, when the time comes to act, we, the people of India, should not be found lacking.<sup>10</sup>

## 7. Absence of Moral Values Among Political Leaders

The parliamentary democracy in India has been going through a difficult period of transition recently. There has been a deterioration in the moral values that have served as our compass for so long. The growing number of instances of booth capturing, violence, kidnapping or assassination of candidates, and other such acts pose a significant danger to the very existence of parliamentary democracy. India has demonstrated remarkable resiliency in maintaining its democracy in spite of the many challenges it has faced.<sup>11</sup> At the present moment, what we are able to experience there are challenges to democracy as a whole on a moral level.

## Conclusion

After 75 years of independence, it is disheartening to observe certain challenges in our democracy. Some politicians, lacking integrity and driven by self-interest, have resorted to questionable practices that prioritize personal gain over public welfare. Institutions such as the CBI, Income Tax Department, and Sales Tax Department, which are meant to uphold justice and accountability, often appear ineffective in addressing these issues. Instead, they seem to function under the influence of corrupt political leaders. The rise in communal tensions in recent years, often fueled by politicians exploiting religious divisions to consolidate their vote banks, further undermines the democratic fabric of our nation. Such actions not only harm social harmony but also tarnish India's reputation as the world's largest democracy. Despite these challenges, it is important to recognize the strength of our democratic framework, which guarantees equal rights and responsibilities to all citizens. For this, we owe much to the vision of the Constituent Assembly.

India remains unique in its unity amidst immense diversity—spanning religions, cultures, and traditions. This unity is a testament to the resilience of its people and their commitment to democratic ideals. While no system of governance is without flaws, the Indian Constitution stands as an extraordinary document, designed to ensure justice, liberty, and equality. It is our collective duty as citizens to participate actively in the democratic process and work toward building a more inclusive and equitable society. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, one of the foremost architects of the Constitution, foresaw the risks posed by the contradictions within our democracy. He warned against the coexistence of political equality with deep-seated social hierarchies and the concentration of economic power. His words remain profoundly relevant today:

*"How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up."* Addressing these contradictions is imperative. By striving for



greater social and economic equality, we can ensure the continued success of India's democratic experiment and honor the vision of its founders."<sup>12</sup>

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