

Democracy in india essay sample

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Introduction

Modernization is marked by democracy and liberalization. With the exception of a few countries like North Korea and other small leftist groups, most of the nations of the world have adopted and embraced democracy as its principal form of political governance and capitalism as its major economic system in which businesses and consumers freely engage in the production and consumption of resources. Even the biggest nations that have become the major proponents of communism like Russia and China have now openly embrace democracy and the free enterprise economic system as a more viable political and economic ideology and system that is responsive and parallel in the global political and economic sphere.

After almost two centuries under British rule, India finally gained their independence in 1947. And with its independence, it has set itself to embrace democracy under a most unfavorable background and adverse atmosphere. Set against a population that is over 2000 million that is born of privation, social stratification, lack of education, cultural and religious differences, language barrier and civil war, India somehow have managed to established the biggest democracy in the world in a short span of time which continued to flourish until today.

India's Constitution: A Bold Experiment

After India's declaration of independence, a commonwealth government was set under the auspices of the British government. The need to draft its own constitution is necessary for national and global recognition of its independence and self governance. A constituent assembly composed of

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representatives from its different states was set to draft the constitution. The constitution, which is the fundamental law of the land, serves as a covenant of the people. Often indicated in its preamble is the declaration of unity among the members of the land, the establishment of justice, insurance of peace and order, and promotion of the general welfare, among others for the new Indian nation. Unlike most constitutions, which evolved from a series of local conflicts and disorder as well as negotiations and compromises among the people of the land, the constitution of India was primarily an integration of different constitutions from different countries that reflect different historical experiences.

Major components of India's constitution were derived from existing constitutions of other countries. For instance, the form of government was drawn from the provisions about the federal structure of government in the US constitution. "The outcome featured an integration of the democratic responsiveness to cultural differences with a federal conciliation of regional community, identity and autonomy claims." (Kohli) The parliamentary system of governance and the establishment of an independent judicial system were taken from the British constitution. (Manoj) The adoption of such forms and structure of governance is bold and daring because the same is not yet tested in the relatively unstable and undeveloped political sphere in India. Its adoption and implementation did not follow an evaluation stage or an evolutionary history, so to speak to test the applicability, practicability and effectiveness of such systems compared to other forms of government like the presidential form.

Freedom of the people is a core characteristic of democracy, which is a manifestation and expression of the sovereignty of the people over the government. (Beetham) In order to ensure that freedom is enjoyed by the sovereign, a bill of rights and the constitution were drafted to institutionalize freedom. The fundamental rights in the constitution of India were also developed from the US constitution. (Manoj) Evolving as a protective measure to prevent the abuses and violation of basic human rights that the people of US have suffered under a colonial government, these rights specifically explicated the rights of the citizens that the government must perform and protect as a matter of duty which includes the freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right against unreasonable search and seizure, cruel and unusual punishment, and self-incrimination, among others. While the principles behind these rights are generalizable within a democratic set up, India is burden with massive illiteracy, diverse cultures and poverty which can be a source of exploitation for government officials or conflict of principles among its citizens. “ Thus, the constitution developed an industrial democracy which integrated social justice of socialism with democracy’s freedom.” (Das) Industrial democracy in India abolished slavery and the caste system. The effective implementation of these principles enormously depends on the passion for freedom and commitment to the people of India’s leadership which will be its next step to gaining full democracy.

India’s First Democratic Election: The Biggest Gamble In History

In the sage words of Abraham Lincoln, democracy is a government “ of the people, by the people, and for the people. (Lincoln) The realization of this simple yet comprehensive description of democracy rests on the process by which the sovereign people will make a decision of who will govern them, free elections. The right to vote provides every individual the opportunity to choose the officials of the government. Unlike other nations like the US that took more than a century before the privilege of voting was equally given to non whites, women and the youth (18 and above), the right to vote was immediately bestowed by the Indian constitution despite the caste system, widespread gender discrimination and illiteracy in general society. The open acceptance of the privilege to vote can conflict to social and religious doctrines while the prevalent illiteracy of the population can be subject to electoral manipulation.

Not only are the uneducated people ignorant of the importance of their rights, they have more pressing concerns such as the struggle for basic necessities because poverty permeates the whole nation. These in depth problems are aggravated by ministerial problems which by its sheer magnitude makes them major concerns as well. For one, the electorate is composed of a little less than 200 million voters, a great majority of which is unable to read and write and are remotely scattered across that nation with an area of more than a million square miles and are separated by terrains that are virtually impassable because of lack of necessary infrastructure. (India Election Commission) In spite of these obstacles and problems of huge proportions and underlying dilemma extant in an inexperienced and infantile

democracy, India was able to pull it through under the headship of Sukumar Sen, Chief Election Commissioner. (Rao)

Despite the relatively low voter turn out and other problems that perennially affect a typical election, this unprecedented election in India managed to establish a leadership that is a crucial step for its democratic independence. “ Voter turnout in India’s first election in 1952 was 46. 6 percent, and the trend has been upward.” (Weiner) Today, in India’s most recent elections in 2004 which featured approximately 400 million voters, India has caught the world’s admiration for holding one of the most efficient elections ever conducted in the history of democracy. Fifty six years after the crucial step, India continues to enjoy that democratic process.

Conclusion

Amidst the adverse and difficult circumstances that loom around India in quest for independence, national identity and self governance, the people managed to establish the largest democracy in world history in the fastest yet risky way. It was a bold experiment because the constitution on which rest the legitimacy of its national government, sovereignty over its territory and union as nation was directly and primarily derived from principles that evolve from the historical experiences of foreign nations that are predominantly from the West. Its first ever democratic elections was the biggest gamble because the condition of the people i. e. poverty, illiteracy, distribution, internal conflicts and divisions, and religious and cultural conventions, may not be prepared to embrace the idea of election including concepts of suffrage and central governance.

In as much as the constitution and its processes must receive utmost political respect and reverence to maintain and reinforce national unity, one of the most important provisions of democratic constitutions is it under the power or sovereignty of the people. While the framers and founders of the constitution successfully laid out the necessary tools and principles that allow for democracy to take off in India, the people retain the supreme authority and control to make the necessary changes or amendments to it so that it can be customized to better serve the nation. Democracy in India continues to persist and evolve today. What was once thought as a bold experiment and biggest gamble is looked upon with high regard and admiration by the world.

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