

Democracy and human rights

[Sociology](#), [Human Rights](#)



Democracy is a very popular form of government. Every nation of the world today either desires to be a democracy or claims to be one. Today, it is a magic word. If truly interpreted it means freedom, justice and equality for all classes of people. Democracy assumes human beings to be basically good, rational and capable of self-restraint. In other words, democracy ensures human rights. Broadly speaking, human rights include right to life, liberty, property and security of an individual which have been guaranteed in our Constitution. Democracy confers certain rights on the people.

But unfortunately these rights are abused in the name of resisting oppression. The rights that those systems of governments bestow on everyone need to be balanced by certain duties and limits. Rights give status to each human being irrespective of his or her talents or the lack of them. They imply that each human being counts purely by virtue of the fact that he or she is human and that he or she is entitled to be treated in a particular way. Rights which are largely based on the fundamental objective of social good provide protection from oppression.

It ensures protection to every section of society including the neglected and weaker sections against oppression and harassment by the powerful individual or government. These rights hold that individual entitlements are of such overriding importance that they eclipse all other considerations. The entitlements of these rights are accrued to human beings just because of their being human. Accordingly, every human being is entitled to assert his or her rights. Indeed, it is very difficult to ensure that individual rights will not be violated in a society.

However, it is necessary to institute a norm that rights are of such primary importance that whosoever violates, should have good reasons for this, i. e. in the larger interests of society. They should be liable to prove this. No doubt this is the unique characteristics of democracy that everyone has the freedom to dissent. But there is certain limit to the expression of dissent, if crossed, it may prove dangerous to social fabric and the unity and integrity of the country, as well. In fact, the success of democracy requires certain conditions which include tolerance, compromise, mutual regard for everyone's rights and freedoms.

It requires rational conduct, good character, an intelligent understanding of public affairs, independent judgement, preferences of public interest. People need to think and work in the broader perspective, sacrificing their own self. They are expected to realise their responsibilities towards community and society. Preference to self-interest leads to the emergence of some negative qualities which may be dangerous to the both society and country itself. Such action hurt the cause of democracy and very often paves the way for dictatorship.

Democracy in real sense means perfect equality between one man and another and in all spheres of human activity. With its liberal democratic institutions and parliamentary system of government, India stands in good position in case of human rights. Indian Constitution incorporates a vast range of political, social, economic, cultural and religious rights of citizens. For ensuring the rights of all citizens, our Constitution allows for some special provisions for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other weaker and

backward sections of society through the policy of reservation and other means.

Untouchability is banned and its practice in any form and anywhere is an offence. Primary education is free and secondary and higher education is subsidised and is being made progressively free. Physical and mental health is recognised as one of the social rights. India has recognised that human rights and democracy are inseparable and one cannot be secure without the other. The existence of the judiciary, free press and voluntary nongovernment organisations, in a way, ensures the protection and promotion of human rights.

In this regard the system of public interest litigation immensely helped in establishing the rule of law and maintaining a check on the arbitrary behaviour of politicians and public authority. The role of judiciary is highly appreciable in promotion and protection of human rights. Besides, remarkable achievements made in various fields of life such as education, science and technology, economics, sports, medical science, etc. have all led to better human conditions.

Furthermore, the land reform movements and other developmental programmes targeting weaker sections of society have added to the better human rights conditions in India. Labour legislation also constitutes an integral part of establishing better human rights conditions. Despite constitutional commitment and legislative reforms, the age old structure of inequality continues to remain a bitter reality. A significant portion of population is subjected to multiple deprivations. Poverty still remains a

formidable challenge with 22 per cent of its population living below the poverty line.

Education, health care, drinking water, etc. remain a distant dream for a large portion of society. Child labour is still present in society, a large portion of them engaged in various hazardous industries. The difference between male and female wages still persists. There are many instances of violation of human rights of particularly the weaker sections of society. Police force in India is still colonial in their character and behaviour. Charges of human rights violation on the police is almost a daily affair.

The gravest unfortunate reality is that the targeting of civil population has become the scary strategy of the new breed of terrorism unleashed by fundamentalist forces. Latest in the series is the killing of Sohrabuddin Sheikh and his wife in fake encounter at the hands of police in Gujarat. Sometimes the killings of innocent citizens in the name of mistaken identity expose the cruel face of our police. Though the presence of a fair judiciary in India is a matter of great relief, justice is done to the victims and guilty is punished.

Thus, there is a need to make them sensitive to civilian needs and human rights. They are required to exercise restraint in exercising their duties. However, it is equally desirable to guard against its misuse by an adversary. In brief, we may conclude that despite instances of human rights violations, India continues to be the largest democracy of the world, having democratic and open society, giving importance to liberty, equality, freedom and people's other rights with the supreme fair judiciary protecting them.

The first Secretary General of the United Nations on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights puts his views in these words, “ Freedom from fear could be said to sum up the whole philosophy of human rights. ” Hence, the people of India need to come forward and join hands with the people of the world in the noble task of making them free from sense of fear and promoting human rights and democracy inseparable to each other.