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FROM DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM TO DEMOCRATIC CULTURE: A VISION TO
MAKE DEMOCRACY AS A WAY OF LIFE

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Abstract: In this account the readers will be introduced to the concept of democratic culture. Their understanding about Democracy will enrich when they will be introduced with the literary works about democracy by different authors. These works truly helps us in understanding about the real notion of democratic culture.

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Democracy is never a thing done. Democracy is always something that a nation must be doing. –Archibald MacLeish¹

This quote by Archibald MacLeish depicts the fundamental nature of Democracy. Democracy is a continuous practice. It demands comprehensive participation and contribution of citizens. Here comprehensive participation means participation in its all aspects. In a

democratic country all people have the authority to choose their governing representatives. It includes freedom of speech, equality, voting, and other necessary rights. American political scientist Larry Diamond has considered four key elements in democracy. A political system for making government through fair elections; participation of people in politics and civil life, protection of human rights and a rule of law, which apply equally to all citizens.

This term originated in Greek mainly Athens. It means ‘rule of people’. It can be also said that it is the capacity of all people to participate freely and fully in the life of their society. In America before independence only white male property owners could vote. Full enfranchisement of citizens was granted by Voting Rights Act of 1965². So, citizens struggled two centuries to get voting right. Different nations have different stories of struggles and movements by citizens to get democratic rights. As earlier mentioned it is not a thing done, but it’s a process. In this

¹ American Poet and Writer associated with Modernist School of Poetry

² Federal legislation in the United States that prohibits racial discrimination in voting

RESEARCH ARTICLE

form of government, decisions reflect the wills and demands of people. It leads to better planning and decisions.

Walt Whitman in his poem 'For You o Democracy' depicted the true nature and essence of democracy :-

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,

I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon,

I will make divine magnetic lands,

With the love of comrades,

With the life-long love of comrades.

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America, and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies,

I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's necks,

By the love of comrades,

By the manly love of comrades.

For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you ma femme!

For you, for you I am trilling these songs. In these line poet has actually reflected democracy not mere as a political system but a way of experiencing the whole world. It is the vision of Whitman to make the "continent indissoluble" and create the "most splendid race the sun ever shone upon". He has envisioned the idea of "indissoluble nation". A nation that cannot be broken into fragments due to the narrow identities of caste, gender, race ethnicity etc.

The line "I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's necks", really touches the heart and soul of the readers. It means human beings will embrace each other. Humanity and peace will be their concern. It is the ideal vision of democracy which the poet has envisioned for America but it should be practiced by all nations.

India is the world's largest democracy. It became a democratic nation post its independence in 1947. All citizens were given the right to vote and choose their representatives. In India, citizens have right to choose government. All citizens are equal before law. There is no discrimination on the basis of caste, race, creed, religion and gender. According to its constitution it has five democratic principles –sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic and republic. So the challenge before the nation is to strengthen these principles and democratic system. The main question is to how to do this? In India government should invest more on education. Currently it spends 4.6 per cent of its total GDP on it. There is need for raising education expenditure. Educated citizens have broader sense of knowledge and responsibility. They can have more influence on the system. Economic growth and Reduction of poverty should be the top priorities of government. Poverty is the root cause of social evils. It leads to crime, anarchy, chaos and other social evils. Unemployed people are soon prone to crime and other wrong conducts. Government

RESEARCH ARTICLE

should generate employment in all sectors. All citizens must have access to basic needs of life such as food, cloth and shelter. Then they will have broader sense of accountability, responsibility, perception and vision.

There are several other factors which affect the functioning of democracy. People should vote without any partiality. They should use their own discretion in voting and selecting the government. There should not do any voting on the basis of caste, creed or religion. Political parties should propagate their welfare policies and must implement them after winning the elections.

During elections there should not be any violence and stress. Citizens should be allowed to participate in free, fair and transparent elections. This can only happen if they have access to education. Illiterate people lack discretion and vote due to greed and avarice for alcohol and money. Such people create a weak, unaccountable and unstable government, which ultimately lack the very essence of democracy.

Candidates having criminal background must not be allowed to participate and contest elections.

Winning parties should not be oppressive. There should be mutual understanding and cooperation between them and other parties. Parties and groups which are not in government should not

adopt any extreme practice but they should be moderate and humble in raising their demands. Winning party should consider the demands of minority groups. Government should implement policies for the welfare of minority groups. It is the duty of minority groups to be moderate in raising their demands and problems. So that there can be better understanding and cooperation. Ministers and bureaucrats must be responsible for their acts in the same manner as common people are subjected to the law and system. They should think about sufferings and miseries of common people. Political parties must have management and clear plan or agenda. They must be active and vigilant to democratic principles and norms. Prestige and fame of political parties and groups on basis of class and sect should not be criteria for consideration and appraisal. Only parties which have strength and vigilance to fight for the right of people should be selected.

There should not be any hereditary rule. Elite families must not always rule again and again. Responsible and educated citizens must be given chance to participate in election and run government. This helps to get benefit of abilities of new and fresh minds in affairs of government. Media must be more vigilant and impartial. It should not blindly favor any political party or group. It should propagate the welfare policies implemented by the government. It must be critical. It must depict merits and demerits

RESEARCH ARTICLE

of the government. It should help in raising the issues and problems of common people. There should be mutual concern and understanding between media and government.

There should be minimization of role of military. Defence and foreign issues must be decided by the elected representatives since they are elected by people so they have power and responsibility to deal with foreign affairs. Government must plan peaceful policies and measures to tackle with them. There should be peaceful cooperation between different nations, so that we will not only get a better democratic India but a better peaceful democratic world. Rabindranath Nath Tagore³ long ago envisioned about a better, peaceful and democratic world in his poem “Heaven of Freedom” :

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit; Where the mind is led forward

³ Indian writer and philosopher who was awarded Nobel Prize for literature in 1913

by thee into ever- widening thought and action

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

-“Gitanjali” Chapter 35. Tagore has envisioned about a democratic India where everyone will have freedom and access to education. People will live in peace and harmony irrespective of different caste, race, gender and class. They will have fresh minds and will think about the welfare of others. They will have broader perception and vision.

There is need for practical implementation of democratic principles and norms. Reforms are required to overcome flaws of democratic system. There is need for strengthening its sustainability. Citizens and government must use all means with more responsibility and accountability to create a better democratic culture.

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