The political system of India: An example of a sustainable democracy.

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ABSTRACT: *Generally the political system of Third World states is known for political instability, chaos, dispute and so on. Most of the states of the Third World are struggling for a stable political system. Although most of them begin their government with democracy, a very few can sustain on that system. But there is one exceptional and surprising state named India bearing all qualities of Third World States able to keep on her political system successfully. Thus, it becomes a puzzle for the political thinkers and scholars. This study will try to explore and examine how it retained sustainability in her democratic government despite thousands of handicap. Basically it will focus on factors which are really responsible for India's successful democracy and reveal the role of these factors in maintaining such stability which can be followed by other countries of third world. This study is completely based on the secondary sources such as books, articles and various tools get through internet.*

Keywords—*Constitution, Democracy, Electoral practice, Federalism, and Leadership.*

India came into being in 1947 from the British rule though she is one of the oldest civilizations in the world named the Indus Valley civilization, goes back at least 5,000 years. After independence like many other new born states India also began with a parliamentary democracy. Regarding their parliamentary democracy on March 28, 1957, Prime Minister Nehru said, "we chose this system of parliamentary democracy deliberately; we chose it not only because to some extent, we had always thought on those lines previously, but because we thought it was in keeping with our own old traditions, not the old traditions as they were, but adjusted to the new conditions and new surroundings. We chose it – let us give credit where credit is due – because we approved of its functioning in other countries, more especially in the United Kingdom."[1]

At present, India has proved herself as a strong and successful democratic state in world. It emerged as a role model of sustainable democratic government for the other states of third world. Even developed states are also very much concerned and interested about the success of the Indian democracy. "Its success in maintaining democratic rule since independence in 1947 (excluding the brief authoritarian interlude of 1975 – 77 emergency) is the world's largest and most heterogeneous democracy runs counter to John Stuart Mill's (1958, 230) proposition that democracy is 'next to impossible' in multilingual societies and completely impossible in linguistically divided society".[2] India is a multilingual, multi-cultural, and multi-religious country where society is intensely divided. Therefore, many scholars and observers doubt and fear about the success and suitability of democracy in the Indian environment. "These doubts and fears are effectively expressed in two of the most important books on India by informed and sympathetic foreigners – Amaury de Riencourt's "The Soul of India" and Selig S. Harrison's "India: The Most Dangerous Decades." Both authors are pessimistic about the prospect for democracy in India and even of the prospects for India's survival as a nation".[3] In spite of all doubts and fears India has passed more than six decades with successful democratic system and appeared as an anomaly in the present world. Not only this but also it still improving its democratic institutions. David Cameroon, the British Prime Minister during his recent visit to India regarded India to be the beacon of democracy to the world.

The well developed and fully evolved form democracy that we witness today in India has taken a long span of time to be matured. It has seen both ups and downs, but has managed to survive successfully. We know that there is no success without any key. Same way there must be some factors worked for the success of India's democracy. Factors which are guided India toward the way of a sustainable democracy. Upon depending on those factors it never looks back rather moves more further to hold a firm democratic system. Here we are going to find out those factors which contributed a lot for the success of India's democracy. We try to encounter the factors from a historical perspective. We know that there are many factors which worked for the success of India's democracy. But here we put light on merely the most cardinal factors which directly helped India to preserve their democratic government in the last few decades. We would evaluate these factors on the basis of

the Indian history as Leftwich writes, "To study politics is to study critically the history of possibilities and the possibilities of history". These factors are described as below.

I. TRADITION OF PANCHAYAT

The Panchayat system of ancient India helps the people of India to cope with the culture of democracy. "The word panchayat describes from, not purpose – a technique of seeking agreement through consultation, hallowed, according to tradition by divine sanction: panch men parameswar. This technique was mainly employed in social or economic organisms......but it was also extensively used for the arbitration of both caste and village disputes".[4] "Panchayat means a council of five and it usually refers to a village council – which may or may not have five members – which has a great deal to say about the life of the people of the village, in social and religious as well as in economic and political matters. Officially speaking, the panchayat is today the lowest and in a sense the most basic – unit of self-government in India".[5]

"In a television interview in London on July 7, 1957, Prime Minister Nehru insisted that India did have a democratic tradition, although he explained that this tradition in centuries past has been manifest largely in villages and other small centers of grass – roots democracy".[6]

By democratic tradition in India Nehru means the practice of panchayat system which taught the Indian about representative institutions. Thus, when India started their journey with democracy in 1947 then this panchayat system worked as the base of democratic system in the village level. And we know that the most people of India live rural level. So, very quickly Indian gets used to with the democratic system. This way this system strengthens the local government of India which is called as school house of democracy. If we consider democratic system as tree then we can say local government is the root of that system. In India that roots is properly maintained by panchayat system which helps India to prolong their democracy.

II. COLONIALISM

"The British ruled India undemocratically, which is perhaps the only way that one people can rule over another, long after they had depended and broadened the institutions of democracy at home; but consciously or unconsciously they trained thousands of Indians in the art of government and administration".[7] The British rule taught the Indian about political party, legislature, legislative acts (1773 acts to 1947 acts), election, civil service and so forth which increased political awareness and knowledge of the people of India. These things really help the Indian to run their state after getting independence from the British rule.

In the early period of the British rule there was no organization to speak for the mass of India with the British rule. Thus, the British rule encouraged the Indian to form a formal organization to promote the voice of the rank and file of India. As a result, the Indian National Congress (INC) set up in 1885 by Sir Alan Octavian Hume, a retired British Civil Servant, with a view to presenting the interests to the British regime in an organize manner.[8] It soon became the prime voice of the Indian middle classes and finally under the platform of this political party India achieved independence and still today it is guiding India toward democracy.

The British government also introduced electoral practice in India by 1882 resolution on Local Self – Government and 1892 Indian Councils Acts. According to the Indian Council Acts 1892, "the   government agreed to allow elections to be held in India under the rule, though the members so elected could take their seats only after being nominated by the Government."[9] Sir Valentine Chirol says, the Indian Council Acts 1892 was a first approach to the admission of the elective principle in the representation of Indian unofficial opinion in Viceroy's Legislative council. So, that was the British rule which acquainted the public of India with the electoral practice. This practice of election facilitated the Indian to adopt them with basic principle of democracy in afterward.

In various times the British rule had enacted various acts to govern the Indian which in later assisted the Indian independent government to form their constitution of 1950 with in a short period and understand the procedures of legislature.

Through the British colonial government the Indian fortunately gets a very experienced and skilled civil service organization which played a cardinal role in the democratization process of India. We know that the success of a government mostly depends on success of its public policies. And in India their civil service always helps the government to formulate and implement public policies successfully which strengthen the position of the government.

According to Prof. Hocking, democracy demands the education and training of the people on sound lines so that they can acquire a sound judgment. In case of India, the period the British colonialism plays a great role as democratic training period for the people of India which helped the Indian nationalist leaders to adopt the parliamentary form of democracy and maintained it successfully.

III.   GREAT LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP

One of India's outstanding assets has been what Dr. Paul Appleby has called "extraordinary national leadership."[10] India has been very lucky because of producing many charismatic leaders who always guide the Indian in a proper way. "These include persons of such diverse qualities, ideals, and personalities as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandi, Subhas Chandra Bose, Vinoba Bhave, Chakravarti Rajagpalachi and Jawaharlal Nehru."[11] In afterward, we can say about Indira Gandi, Rajev Gandi, Sonia Gandi and so on.

Their leaders have no interest in political power rather they work for the interest of the public. Thus, we can observe that after getting independence Gandi easily leave the power what he could easily take it in his own hand. Not only this but also he never want to take any advantage of this power and popularity. So, no one came from his family in the Indian politics. Moreover, he kept his sons away from politics and guided them not use his name to take any benefit. In this way, their leaders always try to promote the practice of democracy rather than nepotism.

According to Tumbasek, the democratic commitment of Indian's leaders since independence has also made contribution to the survival of democracy in India. Most of Indian nationalist leaders were western educated thus these leaders had a well knowledge about the ideals and cultures of democracy. Many of leaders of the independence struggle including Gandhi, Nehru had been trained in Britain had become familiar at first hand with the workings of British parliament democracy, and had been steeped in the ideas of liberal democracy.

Therefore, without any question we can say that India's stable democracy is nothing but a gift of their great leaders. Since ancient period the Indian leaders set up such examples of democratic practices which always guide the coming leaders to run their state in the path of democracy.

IV.   FEDERALISM

The word federalism has derived from the Latin word "Foed us" which means Treaty or Agreement. According to Dicey, "A federal state is nothing but a political contrivance intended to reconcile national unity with the maintenance of state rights." According to Finer, "A federal state in one in which part of authority and power is vested in the local areas while another part is vested in a central institution deliberately constituted by an association of the local areas." So, from above we can say the large new states with vast population, many free states, and multi-culture face many problems of establishing a central democratic government. Therefore, these kinds of states to hold their unity start their journey with federal democratic system   As a result, like the U.S., Switzerland and Canada India also choose the federalism. Many scholars commented that federalism contributed a lot for the success of the democracy in India.

Dr. Paul Appleby says, in his studies of the Indian Administrative System, we astounded to discover how much the Centre was dependent on the States for the actual implementation of major national programs and how little real authority the Centre seemed to have in vital areas of policy and administration. "In both the Centre and the State" he wrote in his report on pubic administration in India, "prevailing structures, except in few fields ...... provide chiefly for coordination rather than for administration."

So, according to Dr. Appelby we can say, in India the centre largely depends on the states for implementing many of public policies which encourages decentralization process. Consequently this works for the growth of democracy in India. In this manner, federalism always helps the Indian to handle the problems of multi-culture, multi-language, and different religions successfully and lengthen the democracy of India.

V.   ELECTORAL PRACTICE

According to Sir Stafford Cripps, in democracy the people must have a free and unfettered choice of their representatives with a right of recall at stated period. Same way, Mr. E. F. M. Durbin points out that for the successful working of democracy the first essential is the ability of the people to choose a government.

Therefore, India ensured the voting right of people of India by the Constitution of the India which is supreme law of the country. The framers of the Constitution of India described about election of India in the Part XV, Articles 324 to 329 of the Constitution.[12] And the article 326 says that elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assemblies of States to be on the basis of adult suffrage. Moreover, the Indian government or leaders always arrange the elections after the said tenure. In this approach people always get chance to exercise their power or to choose their favorite candidate. Not only this but also the Indian government or leaders always showed due respect toward the verdict of the election. It means that the Indian leaders always accept the choice or view of the people unlike to Pakistan. In Pakistan, political leaders hardly wanted to give election. Thus, in eleven years from 1947 to 1958 there was no election for parliamentary democracy in Pakistan.[13] In addition, Pakistan government ever wanted to accept the verdict of their people deliberately. Hence, many scholars said that lack of electoral practices contributed a lot in the fall of democracy in Pakistan. On the contrary, India always encouraged electoral practices and showed proper respect toward the verdict of the mass. This thing increases the political awareness of the people and they realize that they have an

important role to play in the politics. So, it helps to boost the political participation of the people of India. Thus, since the independence of India the participation of the people is always growing. From the following table we can easily understand about the progress of the political participation of the people.

Figure 1: M. L. Ahuja, Handbook of General Elections and Electoral Reforms, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 281.

Election Year	Election Districts	Eligible Voters	Percentage of Eligible Voters
1952	489	173,213,635	45.7%
1957	494	193,652,069	47.7%
1962	494	216,372,215	55.4%
1967	520	249,003,334	61.3%
1971	518	274,094,493	55.3%
1977	542	321,174,327	60.5%
1980	542	355,590,700	57.0%
1984	542	399,816,294	64.1%
1989	543	498,906,429	62.0%
1991	543	514,126,380	56.7%
1996	543	592,572,288	57.9%
1998	543	602,340,288	57.9%
1999	543	620,400,000	60.0%

Fig- 1: Source: M. L. Ahuja, Handbook of General Elections and Electoral Reforms, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 281.

So, from the above table we can easily say that after the independence of 1947 in the last few decades elections have increased in numbers and verities and average participation in Lok Shaba elections has climbed up to about 60%. This enrichment of political participation of people leads India ahead to run in the way of democracy.

VI.   WRITTEN CONSTITUTION

According to Lecky, the essential thing for the safe working of democracy was "a written constitution, securing property and contract, placing difficulties in the way of organic changes, restricting power of majorities, and preventing outburst of mere temporary discontent and more causal coalitions from overthrowing the main pillars of state."[14]Accordingly, the leaders of the Congress Party choose the written constitution as the organic law of the Indian republic which went into effect on January 26, 1950. This constitution clearly describes about the nature of the Republic, the organization and powers and mutual relations of the Centre and the States, the Fundamental rights of the citizens (Articles: 13 to 35), the directive principles of State policy (Articles: 36 to 51), and so on. This constitution spells out almost all pros and cons of functions of the country. It was, in-fact, the longest constitution of the world.[15]

This written constitution assists a lot to maintain the relation between the centre and the states and the stability of the country. It clearly discusses about the functions of the centre and the states which helps to the growth of democracy in India. In this mode, the written constitution plays a great role in the success of democracy in India.

VII.   LOYALTY OF MILITARY TO GOVERNMENT

In maintaining a democratic system of government intact in India the loyalty of military toward the government plays a cardinal role. Because most of the states in the third world, in-fact more than two-thirds pf these states have experienced military intervention already and many more are likely to do so in the near future.[16] By June 1987 the United Nations Organization had 159 members states and 82 of them (50%) had been under military rule at one stage or other.[17] But in the formidable period India as a new democratic state never taken over by their military which undoubtedly strengthen the democracy of India. Even though the war of 1965 between India and Pakistan, India launched an ambitious military buildup plan but in never let the military enter into the political sphere and it set up a tradition of keeping the military's role limited to the battle field and barracks. Besides this all the military barracks of India are situated in the boarder regions unlike to Pakistan where most of the military barracks are located in the main cities. Because of this thing Indian military could not easily intervene in the political issues of the country.

Hence Indian military is in heir from the British military, it is always loyal to the government alike to the British military to crown. Subsequently being originated from the British military the Indian military bears the strong culture of discipline and obedience. This culture guides the Indian military to perform their prime role and duty which increase the development of democracy in India.

VIII.   INDEPENDENCE OF THE SUPREME COURT

At present, the independence of Judiciary is considered crucial feature of the democratic country. That is why the in democratic countries, the Judiciary is considered the guardian of the constitution and the country. Bryce has rightly said, "There is no better test of excellence of a Government than the efficiency of its judicial system, for nothing more nearly touches the welfare and security of the average citizen than his knowledge that he can rely on the certain and prompt administration of justice".[18]   Garner also observes, "A society without legislative organs is conceivable and indeed, fully developed legislative organs did not make their appearance in the life of the state until modern times, but a civilized state without judicial organs is hardly conceivable".[19] Thus, unlike the United States and other democratic states, India has ensured a free and an independent judicial system. According to the constitution the Supreme Court of India was to consist of a Chief Justice and not more than seven other judges. The Supreme Court of India has gained a respectable position in the Indian political system. Its many decisions and interpretation have been played a great role in maintaining the stability of democracy in India. Many of its most important judgments on constitutional issues have related to the interpretation of Article 14, guaranteeing equality before the law, Article 19, guaranteeing important freedoms to the individual, and Article 31, regarding property rights. So, we can say that the Indian Supreme Court is very much instrumental unlike to its counterpart in Pakistan where the Supreme Court is likely the mere court in the world to have faced a recurrent round of challenges arising from as many as six martial law and government dissolution proclamations in less than a quarter century of its existence apart from various other politicized cases.

Therefore, without any doubt we can say that the Indian Supreme Court performs its role as perfect guardian of the country and guide the all democratic institutions in the right path of democracy to enhance the stability of democracy in India.

In summing up, we can say that in this long journey India has faced many challenges to maintain its democracy. Such as Kashmir issue, Babri Masjid Demolition in 1992, the post-Godhra riots in 2002, illiteracy, poverty, backwardness, poor housing, poor health, lack of occupational adoptability, corruption, lack of savings and so forth. Regarding this we can tuned with Jawarhar Lal Nehru, "the sole problem of democracy is that it functions slowly". It means that there would be numerous troubles but with passes of time by gaining experiences and expertise one state can resolve those problems one by one. So, where parliamentary democracy is being a big question for most of the countries of the third world there India could keep up with their democracy because of the above factors. In addition, nowadays the fact is that democracy in India deeply rooted in its culture and its tradition. Thus, many scholars pointed that the nation state of India has quite few things to be proud of and one of them is the rich legacy of the democracy.

Hence, from this paper we can understand how other developing countries like India could strengthen their democracy. If above factors can help India to sustain their democracy, these factors will also work for other countries which are still struggling for a sustainable democracy. This paper can act as medicine for those countries which want to prolong their democracy. Basically pre-colonized countries could take India as role model for their democratic development. Many scholars advised that to establish democracy we should follow the western country but we do believe that western democracy can't be applicable to third world countries. We should apply those methods which is compliant with the culture and tradition of that particular country. As India belongs to the third world countries, third world countries should follow India regarding establishing and maintaining democracy in those countries. Upon analyzing India in this paper we could propose the following recommendations for other developing countries:

- If developing countries could control their military forces like India then it may help them to prolong their democracy. We know that the democracy of the most of developing countries of Asia and Africa threaten by military coup. Thus, if they can follow the tactics of India regarding controlling the armed forces then they could save their democracy from military coup.
- An ideal written constitution can also work as tool to strengthen the democracy of the country. The constitution of India helps them to overcome the differences of languages, races, religions etc. It also ensures the fundamental rights which protect the mass and helps to make the democracy popular among the people. So, if developing countries can make a proper written constitution which will reflect the feelings of general people then it will assist them to fortify their democracy.
- Election is a prime means for democracy which helps the people to exercise their power. How India maintain their electoral practices if other countries can follow that it will also help them to enhance their democracy.
- To maintain democracy another cardinal element is independence of judiciary. By maintaining this element India reinforces their democracy so developing state also have to make their Judiciary independent to achieve success in their democracy.

- Without a well-built local government no democracy can become stronger. That is local government which facilitates India to adapt the culture of democracy so easily. Thus, to strengthen the culture of democracy developing countries should make their local government active and strong.
- To boost the democracy another important ingredient is maintaining a proper balance between the central government and local government. Since the inception of India, they maintain a suitable stability between their central government and local government which facilitates to unite the people of India. Subsequently, if developing countries could maintain the balance between their central government and local government then they could hope for a effective democracy.
- Without a perfect guide and leader no nation could move forward. The leaders of India set up examples of keen leadership which eases the way of democratization for India. Same way if leaders of third world countries could only work for the interest of the country and the countrymen then the democracy is not so far.

We do trust that in spite a developing state and having many challenges like over population, poverty, multi-languages, multi-religion, multi-tribes, multi-culture, corruption etc if India could uphold their democracy in their own way and standing tall as an icon of influential democracy then any developing nation could also anticipate for a sustainable democracy. To make that feasible they just need to follow the democratization process of India which is also not a very hard thing to do. Finally, we can say that the democracy is a continuous process which is not possible to accomplish entirely. Therefore, India is still functioning on their democratization process and same way every country should also strive for the development as much as they could.

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