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Into a genealogical tracing of democracy: Its past and present reality

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Abstract
Regimes throughout have transitioned, sustained, morphed, into numerous processes, patterns, structures and institutions. Amidst this democracy as a political regime fundamentalises as a crucial framework of socio-political arrangement. The edifice of democracy is a layered concoction encompassing categorial epochs throughout its course of history as delineated through temporal and spatial classifications.

Keywords: Regimes, politics, democracy, people

Introduction

Democracy: An Introduction Write Up

In the study of state and society today, the terminology of democracy has become indispensable. Democratic arrangement in the organization of people within a specific political regime has taken a priori position. It is derived from the Greek term *demos* and *kratos*, in literal translation meaning people and to rule respectively. This idea of democracy denoting 'rule by the people' has innately structured people as central to this order. However, democracy being one of the foundational lexicons in the interpretation of socio-political reality. The term has consistently undergone its fair share of uses and abuses. Largely accommodating differential ideas and meanings within its umbrella. Today, this variation of accumulated ideas within the ambit of democracy are so numerous that it is paradoxically at the very of losing its meaning. As stated by Bernard Crick (2000) he expressed democracy as the 'most promiscuous word in the world of public affairs today'.

Democracy: A classical theoretical tracing through Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, Tocqueville

The idea of democracy like any other foundational concept about the state and its *polis* was laid in systematic study by the Greeks. In classical thought we can trace this in Aristotle in his seminal works *Nicomachean Ethics* (1160) and *Politics* (1279). Aristotle engages with the idea of democracy firstly, through his taxonomy of constitution (Lintott, 1992). He undertakes a comparative study of over 158 different constitutions of city-states as case histories to lay his theoretical argument. Through the conclusions derived from his work he generalizes that there were six broad types of government namely Monarchy, Aristocracy, Polity, Tyranny, Oligarchy and democracy. In this, the initial three composed of the ideal forms and the latter three were the perverted forms of the same. Each further, being subdivided into the rule of one, few and many. The stark peculiarity here being democracy as a perverted form of government. On the contrary the best form of government for Aristotle is polity which is a golden mean between Aristocracy and democracy.

This conceptual understanding was further strengthened through Locke who was writing post English Civil War. Unlike his social contractualist predecessor Hobbes, the state of nature for Locke was not chaotic or a state of constant war. There was some form of peace, however, there were chances of conflict. Individuals in the state of nature were innately born with certain inalienable rights known as natural rights. For Locke, it was the right to life, liberty and property. In the state of nature preservation of these natural rights becomes difficult as inequalities grow with the acquisition of private property.

Along with-it other issues like absence of legal body, an impartial judge and the execution of one's due punishment also plays its part. To preserve their natural rights and to come out of this lawlessness individuals sign a social contract leading to the formation of civil/political society with a government. The crucial innovation being the signing of social contract as a form of consent given by people transferring itself to a specific institution. Thus, leading to the maxim of consent as the foundation for political power (Jha, 2018). In democracies the notion of consent through the system of periodic elections have become a pivotal stand for the transfer of power from the people to the representative leaders. Hence, people are the ultimate source of legitimate political authority. Sovereignty is thus, not singular in nature rather popular, dispersed into the people institutionalized through the mechanism of timely elections or referendums. The concept of democracy further concretized itself through the concept of popular sovereignty and general will (Rousseau, 1762/1997). Modern democracies have inculcated the idea of general will as the collective will of all through the mechanism of constitutions and popular sovereignty through elections. Both representing core pillars of democratic institutions.

Throughout the theoretical build up democracy has been presented with positive, decisive and an irrefutable stance as something naturally good for society. However, with Tocqueville's seminal two volumed *Democracy in America* (1835/1840) the pitfalls of democracy were highlighted. The possible degeneration of democracy into 'the tyranny of the majority' - where majority opinion becomes the norm and minorities are significantly subdued. Democracy reduces itself into from 'politics of people' to 'politics of numbers'. In addition, Tocqueville has also highlighted the possible form of 'soft despotism' that states could transform into within democracies through the bureaucratic/administrative centralization. In this the institutions of state assume a paternalistic tendency through providing shadow freedom in place of actually giving it.

Democracy: direct, indirect and in practice

If we do a genealogical tracing of the term democracy through various scholars like Rosanvallon (1995), Manin (1997), Dunn (2005), Hansen (2005), Przeworski come to the conclusion that in its initial development within Britain, France and United State did not specifically label themselves as democracies. The term was can be first traced to be used in 'fifth century BC in a small municipality in Southeastern Europe' (Przeworski, 2019). In English it first appeared in 1531 and later the constitution of Rhode Island referred itself as a democratic/popular government. (Przeworski, 2019).

In its practical structure democracy can be initially traced to Athens practiced in the form of direct democracy. In this, direct participation of the citizens of Athens is identified through an assembly known as *ekklesia*. All citizens of Athens directly participated in *ekklesia* through votes in deliberating legislative and judicial roles, rotation of offices by lot (Ober, 1989). Nonetheless, the idea of citizen then was prominently restrictive as it excluded women, slaves and foreigners. In its theoretical standpoint Rousseau (1762) emerges as a prominent figure advocating positively for the direct participation of the people through the concept of popular sovereignty. In its contemporary form direct democracy is executed through the mechanism of referendum, initiative, plebiscite and recall. These tools of direct democracy have been adopted by various states at varied stages of historical development like the Brexit Referendum, 2016. In widespread practice, states like Switzerland have a historical relation with direct democracy since the fourteenth century (Greenwood, 1998) with mandatory referendum and popular initiatives being constitutionally introduced. From the data provided by Federal Statistical Office from 1874 to 2007 there have been 206 constitutional referendums, 161 optional referendum and 162 popular initiatives. Through this we can conclude that direct democracy is practiced with vibrancy in the Swiss heartland. Likewise, in India direct democracy is practiced in Gram Sabha entered into legal legislation through the 73rd constitutional amendment act.

The anti-thetical form of direct is the indirect form of democracy also known as representative democracy. Its practice can be traced to Ancient Rome through the concept of Republic. In contemporary world, representative democracy has emerged as the most practical and relevant form of democracy. Post-Westphalian state system has undergone significant transitions and evolutionary shifts. Additionally, society in general has evolved with time from slave to feudal to a majorly capitalistic model. The complexity of the modern state, the drastic population outgrowth and the recurring mechanisms required for governance have ushered a reliance on a political regime that is comprehensive and accommodative of these historic alterations. It is representative/indirect democracy that has emerged victorious and adaptive to these conditions of social reality. In these citizens do not directly participate in the decision making rather elect representatives on their behalf. Leaders come to power through the consent of the governed. The ascension of power is done through the democratic mechanism of elections. Voting then becomes a medium of the consensual transfer of power where majority popularity decides the path of representation. Hence, in large democracies like India and US, direct participation of all citizens in the decision making is a tedious and utopian idea prone to doom. Thus, general representation to a section by one through a legitimate practice of elections gives democracy a practical/relevant shape.

The Modern development in Democracy: Behavioralist Perspective and Dahl's Polyarchy

After the Behavioral/Post-Behavioral Revolution, political science in particular and social science in general underwent prominent methodological shifts. Dahl (1971/1989) also felt the need for an empirical version of democracy that was relevant for deciphering social reality from a more realistic perspective. Hence, Dahl initiated his conceptual construct of Polyarchy. Etymologically taken from the Greek word *poly* 'many' and *kratos* 'rule' meaning 'the rule of many'. The notion of democracy proper for Dahl was an ideal figure of 'what ought to be' and polyarchy was the actualized form of 'what actually is'. Polyarchies through their varied institutional parameters presented quantifiable empirical data relating to democratization and the basic criterions for being/not being one. Dahl (1989) outlines the common institutions that features polyarchies into seven categorization *viz*. "Universal suffrage, free and fair elections, elected officials, freedom of expression, right to run for office, alternative source of information and associational autonomy." All these parameters collectively

become responsible for segregating democracies into multiple variations. These institutions enable public contestation/competition and participation which is the nerve point for any democratic interplay of relations between individuals, institutions and state. Throughout his work his central hypothesis underlines that democracy is not static/fixed rather is a dynamic continuum. The nature of it is fluid and has the tendencies of transformations and changes. Thus, streamlining the idea that consensus and conflict (Rustow, 1970) are the inherent characteristics in democracy. They are two indispensable contradictory poles yet these can be carefully reconciled in a manner that solidifies the existence of democracy itself.

Post-Second world war, the larger discussion shifted from democracy and its forms to democratic transition and democratization literature given the broader world environment. During this phase the cold war had started and the world was slowing disintegrating itself into two broad ideological divisions *viz*. the liberal-democratic bloc headed by US and the communist bloc headed by the Soviets. In parallel, the de-colonisation phase had begun with the weakening of colonial powers at the backdrop of the second world war. Leading to the emergence of new sovereign states majorly in Asia, Africa and Latin America. New spaces were created with the emergence of new sovereign states and the waves of transition from one regime to another became a prominent situation. Transition and democratisation slowly presented themselves as the centrifugal forces in the study and actualization of regimes in the world.

The Transition Politics of Regimes

In an in-depth understanding, the term transition means the dissolution of old and the process of shift to something different/new. It is an intermediary phase beginning with the dissolution of old and establishment of a new (Cortana, 1991). It can also be understood as a type of interval between one political regime to another (O'Donnel & Schmitter, 1986). The genesis of democracy necessarily is not geographically, socially, politically or even temporally uniform in nature (Rustow,1970). Likewise, the transition to democracy is also not a uniform disposition ushered by similar institutions and developmental processes. Transition to democracy according to Stradiotta and Guo (2010) can be classified into four modes i.e. Conversion (elite take the lead), Corporation (democratization as a joint action by government and opposition group), Collapse (when opposition takes the lead) and Foreign Intervention (external influence).

The framework for transition literature can be subdivided into various schools of thought. Like Lipset (1959) with his modernization theory provided a structuralist view of transition. In this, he highlighted the importance of institutions/structures of education, socio-politico-economic stability, strong civil society associations and industrialization among others in purview of transition. Likewise, Moore (1966) and Huntington (1968, 1991) present a similar focus on the centrality of structures, systems and processes. Other major school centralizes the notion of agency of individuals as active subject, actors or institutions (like elites). Rustow (1970), O'Donell & Schmitter (1986), Przeworski (1991) follow this line of argumentation throughout their work. Emphasis is given less to the idea of structures, processes, institutions and more to choices of the individual (an active agent) or the collective group actor (role of the elite). Institutional approach prioritizes transition through the presence/absence of institutions as indispensable agents for transition. The institution of elections, electoral systems, constitution - as the body of law, legislative, executive and judicial organs of the government all come under the purview of permanent institutions. The scholars associated with this approach are Lijphart (1999), Linz & Stepan (1996) [19]. in addition to this, the other important schools within this categorisation are the external influence paradigm (transition shaped by external/global factors), the hybrid regime formation discussion and lastly, the critical of transition studies.

The idea of Democratization: Huntington and the three waves/reverse waves

In the discipline of political science, democratization refers to the process through which democracies become more democratic in its overall nature and aspects. It is not a structured development, or a static pre-condition rather democratization involves a dynamic/cyclic (Rustow, 1970) interplay of processes and functions. Those of which are negotiated, contingent and highly uncertain in nature. Democratization breeds at three levels in the form of transition, deepening of its practices and lastly, its idea of consolidation. In recent literature, Huntington (1991) has expressed the process of democratization through its classification into three waves and counter waves. Waves are a symbolic metaphor for analysing the shifts of democracy for many reasons. One most prominent being the nature of democratic regimes as not linear or teleological but inherently, cyclic and dynamic. Secondly, the possibility of reversal - as democracy is not static final destination, regimes undergo or are always in the threat of reversal back into authoritarianism. Hence, concrete generalization is often misleading and amount to false generalization. Thirdly, the resilience of democracy and regime transition is majorly a result of the legitimation crisis and fragility of authoritarian states incapable of being accountable, economically sound and responsible. In parallel to these, external factors as the motor/influence for democratization, interconnectivity and snowballing effect on transition are another important dimension within its purview.

Huntington's three waves thesis begins with the first wave starting from 1820 to 1926 leading to the growth of around 29 democratic states. 1828 marks the expansion of Suffrage in the US and later the western world with UK and France doing the same. However, 1922 - 1942 also witnessed the first reverse wave of democracy with authoritarian regimes in Italy (Mussolini, Fascism), Germany (Hitler, Nazism) likewise, in Portugal and Spain. The periodic timeframe also witnessed a decadent collapse of weak/fragile democracies in Eastern Europe and Latin America. Accounting for the survival of only 12 democracies around the world at the end of 1942. Post World War II to 1962 with 36 democratic states ushered the second wave of democratization. The major reaction of democratic acceleration is identified by the victory of the majorly democratic allied power over the authoritarian dominated axis powers (fascism/nazism). The end of second world war also marked the decolonization phase, with several colonial states becoming independent or majorly transitioned into sovereign democratic states. Nonetheless, this was also followed by a second reversal wave post 1958 to 1970's with Pakistan, Africa and Latin

American countries witnessed a rise in authoritarian tendencies The recurrent Third wave is presumed to begin from 1970s, 80s, and the 90s with United States of America as its flag bearer of democracy amidst the cold war. The starting point as identified by Huntington is the Carnation Revolution in Portugal (1974) spreading throughout Southern Europe, Latin America, Asia, Africa followed by the post-communist countries after the fall of USSR and the lateral end of cold war (1991). The third wave of democratization can be considered as the most widespread/dispersed form of democratic transition in recent historiography expanding itself into a 'global democratic revolution' with atleast 30 countries making transition to democracy between 1974 to 1990 (Huntington, 1991).

Third wave is evolutionarily followed by a reverse wave prevalent in the contemporary era. The third reverse wave uprising in academia can be recognized through the debates of democratic backsliding, illiberal democracy (Zakarai,1997/2003), democratic recession (Diamond, 2008/2015), hybrid regimes (Carothers, 2002), democratic deconsolidation (Mounk & Foa, 2016), erosion within democracies discussion (Levitsky & Ziblatt) as prominent debates.

Democracy: A Contemporary Debate

In historical chronology, democratic timeline of the third wave coincides with second world war, decolonization phase, cold war/end of cold war as epochs having vis-à-vis effect in practice and dispensation of democracy across the world. The development of reverse wave is triggered by the differential nature that democracy has acquired through its temporal and spatial outgrowth. Democracy has been recognized as highly adaptive in accordance to the specific version in which it is seeded on. This natural/unnatural accustomatisation has resulted into a modification of democracy that in recent times has acquired a significantly negative inclination. Within this, the very nature and quality of democracy is questioned. There is an active acknowledgement of hybridization, state intervention, erosion of primary democratic structures and the weakening of liberal institutions leading to illiberal democracies (Zakarai,1997/2003) that present democratic decline or in the words of Larry Daimond (2008 & 2015) democratic recession. The central paradox of liberal democracies encircles a layered debate encompassing firstly, the extent of rightful sanction of individual freedom given by law and secondly, the discussion of individual freedom versus state's power to control/influence/manipulate the same liberty of individual. For instance, the citizens of India are legally protected by the constitution of the land. However, the same constitution that protects an individual also initiates certain policies that creates spaces beyond the purview of law. In this an extra-judicial space establishes in Agamben words, a state of exception. The real time introduction of AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act) in North- East India can be taken as an example of such spaces also majorly discussed by Baruah (2007/2012). Apart from this Membe's idea of Necro-Politics presenting the state's capacity to decide/dictate who lives and who does not exemplifies an alternate version of this debate. Democracy is an inherently dynamic concept, reverberating changes, modifications and adaptations throughout its course in practice and in theory.

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