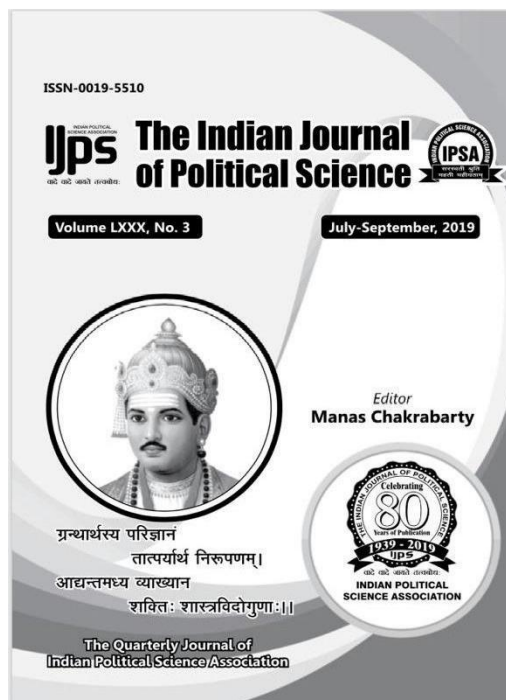


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Dr. Madhuri Sukhija

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A DISCOURSE ON DEEPENING OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

Madhuri Sukhija

India's trust with democracy has been a mixed one, seems close to reaching a fruition point, but yet it is not quite there. Holding periodic elections, peaceful transfer of power and existence of basic civil liberties, are some of India's most prized political possessions. However, democratic institutions have not been able to channelise the aspirations of the people. Political landscapes of the country's elected leaders and confrontation between rival political parties has held the institutions in ransom. India today is the sixth largest economy in the world but ironically, lags poorly in the human development index ratio. Deepening and strengthening of democracy is a dire need of the hour. Several agencies and actors need to come on board. Institutional democracy will have to find ways to legitimise itself through working towards service delivery and social transformation. It is only with the right kind of political mobilization by political parties that new participants can enter the arena and set the tone for coherent political programs. Armed with social capital, a robust civil society can go a long way in putting checks on authoritarian tendencies as well as be instrumental in pressing for government accountability. Alternative forms of governance articulated by various struggles and social movements can provide sufficient space and opportunity for the articulation of identity, be it gender, religion, ethnic and minorities. This would lend the social cultural fabric of India's democracy and further deepen it.

Introduction

Come fifteenth September, each year and the world celebrates the 'International Day of Democracy'. Democracy today is a universal phenomenon with more than two third of the world going the democratic way. In fact, each country has certain elements that are specific to its history and culture which may be identified as democratic assets, be it the tradition of participation and egalitarianism in Scandinavia, pluralist competition in Britain or for that matter, peaceful transfer of power in India. The Indian democracy has been a unique one, replete with conundrums, having a greater breadth to it, than depth to it. Structures and institutions characteristic of liberal democracy were implanted in a rural society and a socio-economic system of considerable backwardness. While traversing the democratic trajectory, one notices, that endemic political instability and a measure of systemic strength have been somewhat co-existent in India.

India holds the title of being one of the most sustained democracies in the world. All the yard

sticks of liberal democracy are well in place, be it universal suffrage, peaceful transfer of power, periodic elections, thereby empowering the people to hold their representatives accountable. Besides, there are a series of legislations that we take pride in, the Right to Information Act (RTI), Right to Education Act (RTE), MNREGA, Panchayati Raj Act and many more.

Any democracy rests on twin pillars- one, the Electoral and Representative and the other- the Institutional. Many a time our institutions have failed to channelise the aspirations of the people, thus hampering the deepening of democracy in India. Personalization of power has given way to deinstitutionalization. The whole socio-economic fabric of the country leaves a lot to be desired. More than ever before, one needs to recall the values of freedom and equality and reaffirm our commitment to them. Being sensitive to the plight of the minorities and the marginalized and not treating them as an economic category and an election agenda, are serious tasks that need to be undertaken to deepen democracy in India.

Dr. Madhuri Sukhija, Associate Professor, Mata Sundri College for Women, University of Delhi, Delhi

