

Final Assignment

The Future of Democracy: New Age Threats to Democratic Systems

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Democracy or *Demos* (human) + *Cracy* (rule) or 'Rule of the People' is the current definition of peace as advocated by many. Starting from Woodrow Wilson's 14-point address in the US Congress in 1919 after the end of World War I, there has been a warm welcome for democracy as a concept all around the world. At the same time around, colonies of the European countries were getting de-colonised one after the other. Many of them were going for popular rule or democracy. That was a period when democracy was seen as a one-stop solution to all the problems of the people.

Democracy by far is a very good regime for welfare of the citizens of the country. Since the people are the supreme there, people can make things run their way. It seems a flawless concept when observed superficially as people ruling themselves cannot have any issues. People know their interests and they can take care of them. Moreover, the concepts of *Rule of Law*, Equality, Humanism, Justice and Liberty have made things much better.

Liberty to Express

Democracies around the world are seen to be more tolerating and more accommodating. Democratic regimes have been known to offer their people more liberty generally, liberty to express themselves, their ideas and thoughts freely. Even people are free to criticise the government but this principle has been one of those underperforming ones within democracy.

Social media and the whole web of newer technologies of communication, sharing of ideas have enhanced the liberty of people. Online resources come with their own set of problems like data vulnerability, privacy breach, cybercrimes, but they have revolutionised the way of living globally. We all know how new modes of communication can blow life to otherwise a peaceful living. In the Indian freedom struggle, English as a medium of education brought a commonality in the people and with the development of telegram and railways, it was easier for people to communicate with each other. These factors are said to have a major impact to drive nationalism and are the main reason behind the demand for swaraj.

"Living conditions don't raise voices, but consciousness of those conditions does..."

Social media has equipped people with information all round the globe, all within one-click distance from them. People in India now know live updates of the protests in Myanmar, US recession from Afghanistan or China celebrating its 100 years of revolution. People are now conscious about what their rights are, more aware about the political regimes round the globe and thus democracy is established more firmly as people demand for their rights proactively.

Threats

China: The Talk of the Town

China, more so after the outbreak of the pandemic has been seen as a country with malicious intentions. There is a sense of 'fear' among the democratic countries about the staggering levels of growth of China. China is advancing in all sectors, be it workforce size, technological manufacturing, funding poor countries or other. There is a clear plan of overloading poor countries with credit which they can never pay off. China has extended enormous loans to more than 80 countries worldwide and the number is increasing day by day. The examples are clearly seen as Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Then gradually, China starts to establish military bases in those countries and expands heavy infrastructure projects. On extension, one can clearly figure out that this is a new type of colonization i.e. 'Economic Colonization'.

China has investments in many new and emerging startups, big tech giants and is a great manufacturing hub for high-technology products. There is practically no country that won't be using Chinese products. There have been critical reports about Chinese companies sharing crucial user data from different countries to the Chinese governments. They tend to raise eyebrows but the kind of opacity in China does not let the air to clear even evident in the case of allegations on the Wuhan laboratory as being the source of Corona.

Another issue around China is their oppression of the Uighur Muslims. The Xinjiang province of China hosts Uighurs, who are allegedly pushed towards ethnocide by military force. Many accounts of people who have escaped the concentration camps talk about serious human rights violations taking place there. Many countries have made allegations on China for the same but they don't seem to pay any heed. Finally their hard control over the sovereignty of countries like Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet and territories of Nepal and India have been another domain of threat. India is at loggerheads with China directly over their encroachments in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. Forceful claims of ownership over Hong Kong and Taiwan is one of their direct attacks on democracy. Chinese dominance and economic colonization merged with expansionist policies pose a serious threat to democracy.

Russia: The Re-Rise

1991, the year of the disintegration of the USSR marked the era of the unipolar world for the coming few decades. Russia after disintegration was never the same and the USA was the only global superpower left. The era saw the US bossing almost every region of the world. The USA was funding wars in the name of democracy in many countries. There was no stopping them. Russia was never written off but was under the carpet for a long time.

The new Russia was even seen as a democracy loving peaceful country. The proof was its strong ties with powers of the west and its inclusion into the G7 (making it G8). Those were merry times under Vladimir Putin. As times passed, Putin showed intentions of continuing his office till perpetuity. And this is one of the most fundamental cracks in the principle of democracy. As one loses the fear of toppling due to people's mandate, the belief in popular sovereignty is faded. The same happened with Russia.

Soon the reports of annexation of Crimea from Ukraine were all over the headlines. This was nothing less than a staunch attack on democracy and there was a lot of hue and cry about the same, all over. It eventually led to Russia's exit from the G8 (again making it G7) in 2014. Since then, the superpowers, US and Russia have not had very good relations. Russian interference in US elections did not go down US' throat well and has increased the tensions between them to the maximum levels. Joe Biden had called Putin a "killer" as well after his election as the US President. This power tussle and coercion between powerful countries is an ominous sign.

India has had good relations with Russia since independence. Russia has been called an all-weather friend of India. Even in times when we were not even self-dependent for our food, when the USA was pro-Pakistan, when no one was by our side, Russia was there. Influence of our then prime minister J.L. Nehru was also a key behind this. Till today, Russia is our strategic partner in terms of military weapons.

Russia might have not been a threat at the level of China, but they cannot be side-lined. In the recent developments, there has been a sensed closeness between China and Russia for strategic infrastructure and energy projects including nuclear energy. This closeness is not a very welcome one for the existence of democracy.

Toppling Democracies: Afghanistan & Myanmar

The top headlines in current happenings in international politics are grabbed by Afghanistan and Myanmar. One was a weak democracy, charged with corruption and entangled by a non-democratic extremist group, waiting for the time to get control over the whole territory. The other where a democratic regime was overnight coup'd by the military and popular rising is being violently suppressed in front of the world, leading to many innocent deaths.

The US have been criticised by many for their failure in Afghanistan as the decision has just proven to be a waste of money, time and claimed innocent lives, without the aim even in far sight. But now they are rather criticised for the sense of urgency they showed to exit Afghanistan. The peace talks between the Afghan government led by Hamid Karzai and the Taliban did not materialise. There is a dead end to negotiations as Taliban doesn't even recognise the Afghan government as a legitimate body.

Taliban has support of countries like Pakistan and indirectly supported by vested interests of China and Russia. India being a close neighbour and strategic partner of Afghanistan for long

is losing ground over its hard toiled efforts of the past. From our side, we have always been on the side of democracy but with the evident rise of Taliban in Afghanistan, India has to extend diplomatic relations with them as well.

On the other hand, Min Aung Hlaing, the army general of Myanmar, coup'd the country and jailed the winner of the election Aung Sang Suu Kyi. Since then, more than four months have passed but the protests don't seem to stop. But the military is using violence as their shield. The world is silent. No country, even the pro-democracy ones to be seen as against the current military government. India on the same lines, has not opposed the coup unilaterally as we have tensed borders with Myanmar which is grappling with insurgency already. We cannot afford to worsen the situation there.

Unfair Means & Democracy for the sake

Many countries in the world have adopted democracy but very few are really a democracy. The democratic ideals are not very easy to follow. It goes against the common urge to concentrate power and be in power for long. Democracy allows room for limitations to exercise power and for criticisms of the policies of those in power. Not many democracies are seen to be taking up criticisms in the right spirit and many times, people's voices have been curbed for the same.

People are to be the ultimate sovereign in a democracy but the same is not observed in many democracies. Yes there are elections for the people to have their say in the political process, but there have been allegations in many countries for rigging the elections and manipulating the results for being in power. Ultimately, free and fair elections are one of the most significant ways to uphold democracy in its true spirit. But the fairness of elections is in question in many countries. The use of money and power to persuade the people or simply buying of votes is another area of concern that comes in the way of democracy.

There may be many authoritarian regimes, military expansions and expansionist ideologies but the real threat to democracy is from within. Curbing the voices of people and practices of election manipulations are the biggest threat as they are detrimental to the biggest characteristic of democracy. Without free and fair elections, a country may be a democracy but only for the namesake.

Global Support for Democracy

There has been a support for democratic regimes all over because other countries believe and rightly so, that democratic regimes are more equipped for national and international peace. Democracies vow for deliberations, discussions and talks, whereas other regimes generally tend to be more authoritative and less accommodative, which is obviously not accepted by people. Powerful democracies like the G7 [USA, Canada, UK, France, Germany, Italy and

Japan] have been pro-democracy and support democratic regimes in every continent. There have been proposals to expand the G7 to D10 (Democratic 10) including India, Australia and South Korea as the other upcoming democratic superpowers.

G7 has always been called an elitist group with not a fair representation from all continents. Inclusion of India, Australia and South Korea will help them brush off their elitist image a bit. But apart from that, a group of all big democracies supporting other democracies gives a strong message to non-democratic regimes like China.

There is a sign of worry among the democracies but all the countries are guided by their own issues and there seems a lack of cooperation among them to save democracy world over from crashing. For example, India is in a doldrum as it is ready to oppose China politically but when it comes to Russia or Myanmar, it cannot afford to question them for obvious diplomatic reasons. Similarly democracies cannot altogether oppose Taliban in Afghanistan as they are the new leaders of the state and it has to be accepted.

The US has its own interests and wants to counter China and control its growing stature as they do not want their unipolar dominance to be questioned. For the same, the Biden administration is believed to have shifted its focus from west Asia to the Indo-Pacific. The US can afford a full-time opposition to China but not all countries as they are severely dependent on them in some way or other. The US has been overtly helping Taiwan and Hong Kong with military supplies which has been aggressively opposed by China.

The strong democracies will have to come together and take a united stand towards the world. They have to try and save weakening and toppling democracies in the world. An awareness campaign about the fairness of the election process, through the use of social media shall be promoted for people round the globe. Democratic countries have to pledge to uphold democracy in the other countries. This should not be done by forceful intervention into the country but through the help of global soft power pressure.

Democracy is not the only and not the perfect solution to human problems, but past experiences have shown that it is a better way to progress, than other regimes. So in the common interest of the world, countries should come forward to save democracy.