

# DEMOCRACY AND IMPORTANCE OF PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION: HIGHLIGHTING THE ROLE OF MEDIA

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## ABSTRACT

*People's participation is the cornerstone of democracy, and it inevitably influences the goals of public policy. Democratization is a process which transits a democratic government to a more democratic political regime through active participation of the people. This paper aims at analyzing the importance of people's participation in the process of democratization and the hindrances towards the process. The role of civil society, NGOs and different modes of communication in enhancing people's participation is also described. Women continue to be under-represented in the political and economic decision making process. To strengthen women's participation for improved functioning of democracy, series of positive measures have been mentioned. The mass media constitutes the backbone of democracy. This paper interrogates these two concepts- democracy and people's participation and attempts to clarify the relationship between them by highlighting the role of media.*

**KEY WORDS:** *People's Participation, Democracy, Democratization, Civil Society, Mass Media, Citizens etc.*

## INTRODUCTION

Abraham Lincoln, one of the greatest proponents of democracy said, "Democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people". Democracy provides scope by which people can participate in governance, and have their say in this process. India's founding fathers propounded democracy as the governance model (The Sentinel, 2018). Democracy is a system of government where citizens are allowed to participate in the proposal and creation of laws. Citizen in a democracy have not only rights but also the responsibility to participate in the political system that, in returns, protect their rights and freedom. "The more people who participate in a democracy, the more democratic it becomes." (De Tocqueville) Citizen participation is generally agreed to be an essential ingredient of a healthy democracy. There are some arguments that the problem lies with the participation gap while making informed political decision (Dalton, 2017). Public participation is intrinsic to democratic governance. In democratic societies people participate through different ways, such as voting, expressing opinions on public issues and governmental actions, forming interest groups, influencing decisions by demonstrating or lobbying, filing lawsuits to contest actions, mobilizing attention to issues through artistic expression etc.

## PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION

The concept of participation in democratic governance focuses attention on the interaction and linkages between state and society and how the people can take part in public life. A very important pillar of democracy is the involvement of citizens in political decision making process. Democratic practice of citizens does not end in choosing public representatives.

Democracy also means that people who have been elected are accountable in various ways to the people who voted for them. If the government becomes unpopular or does not do what it promised to do, people can replace them. This is essentially how democracy works and why it can be an effective system of government with the help of people's participation. In a democracy, people have the right and duty to participate in government and in civil society. People's participation is one of the major democratic principles that most people believe as essential for democracy to thrive.

## OBSTACLES TO PARTICIPATION

There are still many obstacles that make people unable to fully participate in a democratic decision making process. Mass poverty, a low level of education and other evidences of little respect for and realization of economic, social and cultural human rights normally limit the expansion of participation, even in a democratic structure for participation. Socially and economically disadvantaged groups have lower political participation rates than middle and upper groups. When it comes to the participation of women, children and other excluded groups, cultural values and norms may also be a hindrance to participation (Report, The Political Institution, 2003). Political apathy is produced in everyday life over the course of conversations, interactions and in the 'backstage' of life. Individual censor themselves even in situations where political discussion is encouraged, believing they, as lower class citizens, are not authorized to have such discussion. Though there are various improved modes of communication available now, but they continue mostly to benefit the world's rich minorities. In this case we can mention about the marginalized and poor people who have really less access or no access to internet.

## WAYS TO ENHANCE PARTICIPATION

One way for the state to enhance responsiveness and accountability is through decentralization of decision making to lower level of government. It is important that enabling institutional channels and framework be developed for active participation to occur. All lower level in political system, women often have difficulty in winning seats and making their voices heard. The best strategy for tackling this problem is to reserve a proportion of seats for women. Participation of women in democratic process can be enhanced by developing mechanisms of interaction between women's NGOs and grassroots groups and local self-government bodies in order to promote public participation and increase the capacity of grassroots actors to oversee the performance of their governments (ODIHR, 2006). Democracy does not only require functioning democratic institution and channels that are open for participation. To work well, democracy also needs democrats. It is, therefore, often through the civil society that people enter the educational process of learning democratic process. NGOs play an important role in training need of democratic management, leadership, economic management; planning, participatory market etc. creation on development of network can empower people to be able to voice their concerns.

## ROLE OF MEDIA IN ENHANCING PARTICIPATION

Media plays a vital role in enhancing people's participation in a democratic country. Media keeps the people awakened and there is no denying the fact that it has become one of the major instruments of social change. In a democratic set up, it is media which strengthens the democratic norms and values and also accelerates the pace of development. Democracy requires the active participation of citizens and the media keeps citizen engaged in the business of governance by informing, educating and mobilizing the public. It is the mass media that make the exercise of freedom of expression a reality. The mass media, which proclaimed as the fourth estate, a co-equal branch of government that provides the check and balance without which no government can be effective in any democratic country. Moreover there are some theorists who believe that media are anti-democratic because of their power to manipulate the way people think (Coxall et.al, 2003). Social media is becoming most important tool for people's participation and engagement in the decision making of the government. Interaction in social media has a strong influence on the propensity to the participation in politics. The main platforms of social media like twitter, facebook whatsapp etc. play vital role in replacing traditional media, fascinating political engagement, strengthening strategic collaboration with people and to take influential position in Government decision in a democratic country. Public participation with prior internet tools did not meet expectations. With social media this could change, because

participation seems to be the key concept that explains the difference between 'old' web and 'new' social media (Effing et.al, 2011). Communication through social media has found impact on decision making and social behavior of people. Younger generations are becoming more involved in politics due to the increase of political news posted on various types of social media. social media platforms provide tools for individuals to come together and share their opinions in particular topic. In the era of advance science and technology, people have discovered how social media can be used to facilitate communication, exchange of ideas and mobilize citizens around civic and political issues.

## CONCLUSION

Democracy and people's participation go hand in hand in the process of decision making. Involvement of citizens in the political process is an essential part of democracy. People's participation offers a new way of thinking about development. Participation is important for improving public resource management and reducing corruption, by making public servant and political leaders accountable to the people. As a right, citizen participation becomes more than a technical fix. It creates a dynamics where citizens can engage governments for the benefit of the larger population that is often excluded from formal political affairs. Civil society has an important role in the democracy development by trying to raise citizens' awareness about the importance of their role in the society. The role of media in facilitating the flow of information for the development of communities is very important. No one can seriously ignore the impact of today's media on society, politics and governance, especially in developing democracies.

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