Changing Nature of Indian Democracy in the Post 2014 Era

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Abstract : *The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) won a clear majority in 2014 general election, and Narendra Modi became the prime minister of India. He brought a new chapter in Indian politics by introducing several new policies and reforms that drastically changed the country's democratic system. BJP's rise to power has prompted hopes for economic development and political reforms, however it also brought about worries of the possible erosion of secularism and the stifling of dissent. This article aims to examine the evolution of India's democratic terrain since the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014. The article highlights the major social, economic and political evolution that occurred in India after 2014. It also examines the impact of these changes on India's democratic institutions and indicates the ways to preserve a dynamic and inclusive democratic India for the foreseeable future.*

Keywords: *Indian Democracy, Post 2014 Era, Dissent, Pluralism, Economic Growth.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The democratic nature of India has evolved over the years. There have been several noticeable changes to India's democratic processes since Bhartiya Janata Party came to power in 2014, which includes transforms in discourse on politics, the increasing influence of social media, and the beginnings of new trends in politics. The country has seen remarkable shifts to its democratic set up and actions. After 2014, a lot of political and economic reforms came into effect, creating potential opportunities and concerns for India's democratic system.

In the post-2014 era, the evolving nature of Indian democracy has profound consequences for the country's democratic framework and principles. Indian democracy has transformed in accordance with a number of concerns, including emergence of new actors, the proliferation of majoritarianism, increasing power of money, growing role of social media and technology, degradation of secularism, evolution in the federal structure, and the economic strategies adopted by the government. It is crucial to deal with these issues and protect India's democratic institutions and principles.

II. OBJECTIVES

The study aims to focus on the objectives outlined below.
1. To find the changes in Indian democratic system under BJP rule.
2. To assess the impact of these changes on different democratic institutions.
3. To recommend how to strengthen Indian democracy.

III. TRANSFORMATION OF INDIA'S DEMOCRATIC LANDSCAPE

Since the BJP came to power in 2014, India's democratic landscape has undergone significant transformations with both positive and negative outcomes. Scholars have identified various areas of change, including improvements in social welfare, infrastructure, technology, and many other domains. Scholars have debated the shifting nature of Indian politics and the challenges facing Indian democracy in the contemporary era. The impact of these changes on the long-term stability of Indian democracy remains a subject of concern. Let's explore both positive and negative transformations in Indian democracy under BJP's rule.

IV. POSITIVE CHANGES

4.1 Political Stability

Narendra Modi came to power after a landslide victory in the 2014 general elections. The BJP won 282 seats out of 543; in last 30 years, no single party had won such victory in Lok Sabha. In 2019 elections, the party secured 303 seats which helped to form a strong government and indicated political stability in India. The substantial majority of the BJP in parliament allowed the government to make long-term decisions and significant legislative reforms. The government's significant policy decisions Goods and Services Tax (GST), Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), repeal of Article 370, and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which would have been more challenging to enact in a less stable political environment. Though the repeal of Article 370 and the NRC are controversial, they have also brought about significant changes in the country (Aiyar & Tillin, 2020).

Political stability has also helped to improve India's relations with other countries. Modi has made a number of high-profile visits to other countries, including United States, China, and Japan, and has built strong relationships with world leaders. This has helped to improve India's standing in the world and has made it easier for India to get its voice heard on the international stage. The Global Soft Power Index 2022 places India at number 11 on the list of countries in terms of their soft power influence (Desk, 2022). It indicating an upward trend in the country's international reputation.

4.2 Economic Growth

The economic policies of the government led by the BJP in India have transitioned towards neoliberalism, which can be seen by the implementation of privatisation and deregulation measures (Chattopadhyay, 2017). Adopting policies such as the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) are some of the measures implemented to attain this objective. Since 2014, India's GDP has risen at a compound annual rate of 7.4 percent. This is the fastest pace of growth in India since the 1980s (World Bank, 2022). This growth has significantly impacted poverty reduction and helped improve the living standards of a large section. Favourable demographics of India have been an important contributor of its economic progress. India's growing young population provides a large pool of workers and consumers. With population growth and urbanisation, and rapid growth of middle class boost the demand for goods and services, helping the economic growth of the nation (Gagal, 2022).

By reducing bureaucratic red tape and simplifying regulations, the Indian government is also improving the investment climate in the country, which attract foreign direct investment. Growth in the number of newly set up manufacturing industries in India helped to create jobs and boost exports. India's Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF) report (2022) shows that India's manufacturing sector will grow by 11-12% per annum in next five years. Government's initiatives to promote the E-commerce sector have significantly contributed to economic growth driven by India's services sector, particularly the IT and telecommunications sectors. In terms of employment and foreign exchange, the service sector has the potential to contribute to India's economic growth.

However, some criticised the government's economic policies for their impact on marginalised communities, which has contributed to a widening income gap. The push towards privatization and deregulation has led to job losses and labor market insecurity, particularly in informal sector.

4.3 Environmental Development

Since coming to power in 2014, Modi government has implemented a number of environmental development initiatives to ensure sustainable development. In 2014, the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan was launched to make India open-defecation-free and improve waste management. Apart from this government took several measures to preserve forests, reduce air pollution, and conserve water. According to a study by Jangra et al. (2016), the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has had a measurable impact on the cleanliness of public spaces in India. Since the launch of the program in 2014, the number of households with improved sanitation facilities has increased significantly, and open defecation rates have decreased.

The Indian government has also initiated attempts to widen the use of renewable energy like solar and wind. According to a report by Invest India (2022), India ranks 4th for producing renewable energy in wind and solar power capacity. The Government announced a target to produce non-fossil fuel-based energy of 500 GW

by 2030. Renewable energy capacity (including large hydro) rose 2.20 times from 76.37 GW to 167.75 GW and total solar power capacity has grown 24.07 times from 2.63 GW to 63.30 GW from March 2014 to December 2022. The environmental policies adopted by Modi government led India a global leader in sustainable development, with significant improvements in renewable energy, sanitation, and waste management.

4.4 Foreign policy

Modi's foreign policy is considered as muscular policy, which has brought many beneficial effects on India's democratic system. Modi has visited 69 countries, more than any other Indian Prime Minister, as per the data published in the PM India web portal. The visits resulted in enhancing diplomatic ties with other countries and created opportunities for trade and investment for India. PM Modi has attempted to maintain a cordial relationship with the neighbouring countries Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. This has helped ease tensions and grow cooperation which is essential for India's long-term safety and security. The initiatives of Prime Minister Modi to enhance diplomatic ties with Bangladesh have resulted in the execution of numerous significant accords, including a land boundary agreement that had been delayed for several decades (BBC News, 2015).

Modi's foreign policy emphasizes enhancing India's relationships with global powers like United States and China. Under his leadership, India has strengthened its military relationship with United States, encompassing enhanced collaboration in defense, trade, and counterterrorism. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), expands collaboration between the Indian and American forces, which was signed Modi's visit to the United States in 2016 (The Economic Times, 2016).

4.5 Infrastructural Development

Indian government programs aimed at improving infrastructure have stimulated economic growth, improved connectivity, and provided job opportunities, benefiting millions of people. In 2014-15, there were 97,830km of National Highways in India, which will increase to 145,155km by March 2023. Highways and roads play crucial role to economic growth of any nation. Roads are significant because they carry around 85% of annual passenger traffic and 70% of annual goods traffic (Outlook India, 2023). In order to promote industrial activities throughout the country, Indian Railways has commissioned 1,724 KM of the 2,843 KM of the Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) by February 7, 2023 (Mondal, 2023). The proposed greenfield airport in Navi Mumbai, an experimental project of government, will facilitate to accommodate 60 million people and 1.5 million tonnes of cargo per year will be completed by 2024 (The Indian Express, 2022).

4.6 Digitization

Since taking office in 2014, Modi government has been promoting country's digital infrastructure as a top goal. In July of 2015, the government initiated 'Digital India' programme which aims to make India into a "digitally empowered society and knowledge economy." Ministry of Electronics & IT report predicts that India's digital economy will be worth $1 trillion, which represents 20-30 percent of GDP (PIB Mumbai, 2019). The continuous focus on digitalization has increased access to digital services and information by rural people. A survey by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Kantar (May 2023) showed that in 2022, 399 million of India's 759 million active internet users were in rural areas. The research estimated, 900 million Indians would be online, with 56% of those users residing in rural areas by 2025 (Rural India Getting Net Savvy: Study, 2023).

The use of digital technologies in government has also increased transparency and effectiveness. The Aadhaar system, a digital identity system, has helped the government reduce social programme costs by identifying and removing duplicate and fake recipients. The widespread use of digital technologies has aided in boosting the nation's productivity by increasing government effectiveness and transparency.

4.6 Social Welfare

Modi government has launched social welfare programs to provide financial assistance and skills training to the poor and unemployed to alleviate poverty and unemployment. Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) is one the programme which provides financial access like banking, insurance, and pension schemes to unbanked people. Over 48.93 crore accounts have been opened under the PMJDY as of March 2023, with a cumulative balance of over Rs. 1.98 lakh crore (Ministry of Finance, n.d.). Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas

Yojana (PMKVY) is another initiative of the Modi government that intends to aid the country's youth and unemployed people develop professional abilities. According to the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (2022), as of September 2022, the PMKVY programme had successfully taught over 7.36 lakh individuals in a variety of skills.

Free LPG connections were provided under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) to encourage cleaner cooking fuel and decrease indoor air pollution for below-poverty-line families. At the end of January 2023, 9.58 crore connections had been released under PMUY and a subsidy of Rs.200 per 14.2 kg cylinder was provided to the beneficiaries for up to 12 refills per year. Modi government has also launched numerous other social welfare programs like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) for affordable housing, the Ayushman Bharat scheme for healthcare, and the Atal Pension Yojana for pension benefits. The lives of ordinary Indians have been profoundly improved because to these social welfare initiatives.

V. NEGATIVE CHANGES

5.1 Rise of Hindu Nationalism

After Modi coming to power in 2014, Hindu nationalism and polarisation have increased significantly, which resulted in degradation in country's democratic values. Human Rights Watch report (2020) found that the Modi government failed to protect minorities from violence by Hindu nationalist groups. Moreover, the report demonstrates that the government has failed to investigate and prosecute these attacks credibly or to hold the perpetrators responsible. According to Reporters Without Borders Index 2021, India ranks at number 142 out of 180 nations, it is worrying that dissent has been crushed and freedom of expression has been constrained.

Furthermore, the way people treat the religious minorities, particularly Muslims is also a concerning issue. It has been widely viewed by many that the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) passed in 2019 is discriminatory, as it offers citizenship to non-Muslim minorities from neighboring countries while undermining the secular foundation of the Indian constitution. Consequently, Hindus and Muslims have gradually divided Indian society. In February 2020, more than 50 people were killed in clashes between Hindus and Muslims, in Delhi, illustrating the growing divide between the two groups (BBC News, 2020). Hindu nationalism and increased polarization threaten the core values of India's democratic institutions, which adhere to a secular, inclusive societal model that protects minorities' rights and promotes freedom of expression.

5.2 Erosion of Civil Liberties

Since 2014, India has seen a decline in civil liberties and attacks on freedom of speech, and these shifts have caused widespread public concern. According to World Press Freedom Index, India's freedom of the press has been getting worse since Modi became Prime Minister. In 2021, India was in the 142nd spot out of 180 countries, and in 2023 slips to 161st spot (ABP Live, 2023). The report suggests that Journalists who criticise the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are being assaulted by BJP supporters.

The government has implemented many laws, like sedition statute and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), which subdue dissent and critics. Data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) shows that number of arrests made under UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act) law in 2019 increased tremendously, over 72%, than in 2015 (The Hindu, 2021). India anticipates the highest number of internet shutdowns in 2020, resulting in allegations that the government is using this tactic to silence dissent.

5.3 Human Rights Concerns

Since Narendra Modi came to power in 2014, human rights in India have fallen substantially, with extensive allegations of activists being detained and extrajudicial loss of life occurring. A report by Human Rights Watch indicates that the Indian government is using different laws to restrict the journalists, activists, and others who express dissatisfaction with the government. Furthermore, the report noted that a climate of lawlessness exists due to the government's inability to establish accountability for past violations and the rising harassment of human rights advocates.

The increasing number of extrajudicial killings is also a major concern of Modi government, where police officers shoot suspects in what they called 'encounters', reporting that the victims resisted detention. Concerns over police brutality in India have been sparked by narratives of police officers torturing and killing suspects in detention. The Modi government has been questioned for not being vigilant enough to defend the human rights of its citizens and for being ignorant to address these issues.

5.4   Violence and Intolerance Against Religious Minorities

        The annual report of United States Commission on International Religious Freedom's (USCIRF) (2023) revealed a concerning situation in India regarding religious freedom of the minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians. According to the report, religious freedom conditions in India worsened in 2022 as the government enforced discriminatory policies and suppressed critical voices of religious minorities and NGOs through surveillance, harassment, and detention under UAPA and FCRA.

        A self-appointed cow vigilantism movement of Hindus attacks and even kills Muslims suspected of eating or transporting beef. Mob violence by extremist groups continued throughout the year amid rumours that cows were being sold, purchased, or killed for beef, and that governmental authorities failed to hold those responsible accountable. A report by Human Rights Watch showed that between May 2015 and December 2018, cow vigilantism caused at least 44 deaths in India.

5.5   Failure to Deliver Promises

        Prime Minister Modi is well known for his enormous dreams to improve India's socio-economic structure. He plans to create new job opportunities and reduce poverty to accelerate economic growth of the country. India may already have surpassed China in population, but government has not created enough jobs, which resulted in increasing unemployment and subsequently impacts India's democracy negatively. The report of Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) shows that India's unemployment rate took an upward move of 8.11% in April 2023. It indicates that government failed to create jobs as promised by Modi during his election campaign.

        Moreover, Modi's promises to reduce poverty have not succeeded in lowering poverty rate of India. Even though the government has attempted to reduce poverty rate, but has not succeeded desirably. Modi's inability to deliver on these promises has adversely affected the credibility of government and Indian democratic system. Government should take concrete steps to reduce poverty rate for standard of living of millions of Indians.

5.6   Increased Militarization of Kashmir

        Militarization and abuses of human rights in Kashmir have escalated during Modi's terms of office as Prime Minister. A severe humanitarian crisis in Jammu and Kashmir resulted from the Indian government revoking Jammu and Kashmir of its special status and imposing a communications blackout in August 2019 (Nadaf, 2021). Several accusations were raised against government involving the use of excessive force, extrajudicial killings, and sudden disappearances of civilians.

        There are several other changes that have occurred since Narendra Modi became Prime Minister of India in 2014. Employment, Ease of doing business, Women empowerment, centralization of power, weakening of federalism, corruption, anti-defection, Mob Lynching, Increased intolerance etc. can be studied more thoroughly.

VI.   IMPACT OF THE CHANGES ON INDIAN DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

        The Constitution, electoral system, political parties, legislature, judiciary, independent media, and civil society, all these democratic institutions have been significantly impacted by the changes that have occurred since Narendra Modi took office in 2014.

6.1   Impact on Constitution

        A number of changes to the Constitution of India including Goods and Services Tax (GST), 2017, Abrogation of Article 370, 2019, Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 etc. happened in the post 2014 era. Critics argue that government's actions violate the Constitution and threaten the future of Indian democratic system. Some argue that these changes have weakened federal structure and the Constitution's secular identity and restricted the right to freedom of speech by cracking down on dissent. While Modi government defended its record by saying it is committed to protecting the Constitution and democracy, secularism, and pluralism.

6.2   Impact on Electoral System

        Modi Government has had a profound impact on electoral systems, such as implementation of electronic voting machines (EVMs), promoting voter awareness campaigns, introducing NOTA (None of the

Above) option, and strengthening of the Election Commission (Dalal & Chug, 2016). These initiatives made electoral process more transparent, secure, and democratic while increasing voter participation and ensuring equal representation for all voters. While opposition parties and activists have raised concerns about security and accuracy of EVMs, alleging that they can be manipulated.

6.3 Impact on Legislature

Government has taken several steps to strengthen parliamentary institutions like introducing e-Parliament. Government has made legislature more transparent and accountable, e.g., the Right to Information (Amendment) Bill, 2019 streamlines how information commissions work. However, passing of several controversial bills, like Citizenship Amendment Act and Farm Bills, have been met with protests from the opposition and civil society. Modi government has also faced criticism for using its parliamentary majority to pass legislation without proper debate and for suppressing dissent in the legislature.

6.4 Impact on Judiciary

Modi government has had a significant impact on the judiciary, both its composition and functioning. E-courts have been introduced to provide faster and more efficient justice delivery by digitizing the entire judicial process (Kumar Tiwari & Singh, 2020). The government has been accused of interfering in judicial appointments and transfers and packing the judiciary with loyalists. The government has also been accused of targeting political opponents with the Enforcement Directorate. It is important that how the relationship between the judiciary and government will develop under the Modi government.

6.5 Impact on Political Parties

Political parties in India have been impacted significantly under the Modi regime. BJP has consolidated power and expanded influence in several states. In contrast, national political parties like Congress and the Left, and other regional parties that have traditionally dominated certain states, have started losing support. Tensions and polarization have grown between political parties due to BJP's Hindu nationalist agenda, which led to the erosion of India's secular fabric. The funding pattern for political parties, use of social media, and other factors help BJP strengthen its support base compared to other political parties.

6.6 Impact on Independent Media

Journalists and media watchdogs are concerned about the impact on independent media under the Modi government. Self-censorship among journalists and media outlets is growing because of government's crackdown on dissent and critical reporting. Sedition laws and license suspensions have been cited as measures used by the government to stifle independent media. There are also questions about media's independence and impartiality because of government's close ties to powerful media companies. These actions have raised concerns about media freedom and independence.

6.7 Impact on Civil Society

Modi government has had a big impact on civil society, especially as it relates to NGOs and civil society organisations. Government has launched many programmes to strengthen civil society, including Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign and other initiatives. However, government regulations have tightened on foreign funding for NGOs, resulting in a significant drop in foreign funding. Furthermore, government has been accused for targeting and harassing those NGOs that are critical of the government. Many organizations are now afraid to speak against government policies for fear of retaliation.

VII.   RECOMMENDATIONS

Indian democracy has improved significantly since 2014, there are still challenges to overcome to ensure a vibrant and resilient democracy

1. Safeguard the independence of the judiciary from political influence and expedite the resolution of pending cases.
2. Government should be more transparent and open and will remain accountable in public dealings.
3. Government must encourage civil society to participate in policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring while protecting their independence.

4. Government should safeguard freedom of expression and press so journalists and individuals can share their opinions freely.
5. Prioritize investment in quality education and digital literacy to empower citizens and promote democratic values.
6. Establish mechanisms for political accountability, including stricter anti-defection laws and recall provisions for non-performing representatives.
7. Government must promote harmony, peace and security to its citizens.

Implementing these recommendations can promote democratic values and enhance citizen participation while ensuring inclusivity in shaping India's future through a multifaceted approach.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Indian democratic system has experienced notable transformations with the rise of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power in 2014. Modi government has implemented numerous programs, such as Digital India, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Make in India, and others, to strengthen India's democratic institutions. In contrast, the government has been criticized for handling issues like Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and farmers' protests. Freedom of Press and speech have been questioned in the country, with the government accused of suppressing dissent with sedition laws. Indian democracy has seen both positive and negative changes since 2014, but it is necessary to continue to be a vibrant and dynamic system. The country's leaders must ensure that democratic values and principles are defended and strengthened as it navigates its complex political landscape.

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