**Unmasking the Autocratic Nature of Indian Democracy**

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India claims to be the biggest democracy in the world. But looking at the recent trends one wonders, whether this claim holds any substance. Since its independence, India concocted an image of a secular democratic republic as stated in its constitution. But it could not hide the reality from the world for too long. Over the years, the atrocities against the minorities and the oppression against dissent contradicts the Indian claims of democracy and exposed its real face for what it truly is; “electoral autocracy.”

Democracy pertains to the basic principles of equality, freedom of speech, inclusiveness, and participation of the public in decision making in a nation. The death of democracy in India entered its final stage when the BJP, champion of Hindutva ideology, came into power in 2014. Hindutva, as a matter of ideology, considers Hindus superior to other religious communities; considers them as true Indian as opposed to members of other faiths. The basic democratic principles were slammed in India, and a religious-nationalist and fascist movement has taken a national stage. The key target of hate and violence since then has been the Muslims of India which constitute 14 per cent of the population. Not only Muslims but other religious minorities in India were also mistreated and targeted by Hindutva-aligned groups since BJP came into power.

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India’s democracy has eroded over the years as extremist elements have ingressed in the highest echelons of the power corridor. The situation has deteriorated to the point where “Freedom House” has downgraded India’s position as a democracy to “Partly Free.” Sweden Varieties of Democracy Institute not only classified India as an “Electoral Autocracy,” but it also made it to the list of top 10 autocracies. The Economist List also downgraded India’s position in democratic countries ranking from 35th to 53rd rank.

The condition is worsening day by day as the fascist Hindu ideology is rising.

Since 2014, the BJP government supported harassment, unwarranted arrests, and prosecution of activists, journalists, students, academics, and other critics of the government or its policies.

As soon as Modi’s reign began, dozens of murderous attacks on Muslims by the Hindu mob were reported in Uttar Pradesh. The BJP government sided with the murderers in the name of religion while the judiciary stood idly toeing the government’s policy of appeasement towards Hindu extremists. It shows the reality of the secular veil of India where only Hinduism is considered the Holy religion.

Muslims were attacked openly and the authorities accepted this culture as normal. Muslim majority areas were targeted. Even the special constitutional status of IIOJK was revoked in August 2019 as the Modi government unilaterally nullified the constitutionally granted semi-autonomy to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Citizen Amendment Bill allows migrants from adjacent countries to apply for Indian citizenship if they don’t follow Islam, implying that citizenship in apparently secular India is based on religious identity. Muslims have also been the victims of communal rioting and mob lynching on several occasions. Modi’s government and its allies’ constant anti-muslim rhetoric, along with the authorities’ lack of condemnation, has fueled the idea that such illegal and unconstitutional violence is tacitly supported.

The government’s treatment of political opponents is the major predictor of democratic deterioration in India. The Indian state has consistently shown contempt for dissent under Modi, attempting to portray critics of the administration as “anti-national.” Academics, activists, and journalists who criticize the powers that be, have been targeted by the central government. Authorities recently detained a young student climate activist, Disha Ravi on allegations of sedition for sharing a toolkit to create and spread awareness about the farmers’ protest.

Several alarming political tendencies in the Indian nation have been identified, including the development of a Hindu-majority political brand. The executive’s overwhelming concentration of authority, as well as the government’s crackdown on political dissent and the media. Much of the shift is linked with the prime minister’s image, whose electoral appeal is based on his self-acclaimed desire to disrupt politics as usual. Despite multiple scandals, Prime Minister Narendra Modi enjoys enormous popularity. His hold on the popular imagination has not lessened, and its repercussions for Indian democracy are immense. Today, India is no less than a scam in the name of democracy where there is no freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, freedom of religion, and basic rights.

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