

# **Perspective: Bharat: The Mother of Democracy**

For Prelims: Indian <u>Democracy</u>, <u>G20 Summit</u>, P20 Summit, <u>Public Digital Platform</u>, <u>SDGs</u>

**For Mains:** Comparison of Indian Democracy with other world Democracy, Continuity of democracy in India over centuries.

#### What is the Context?

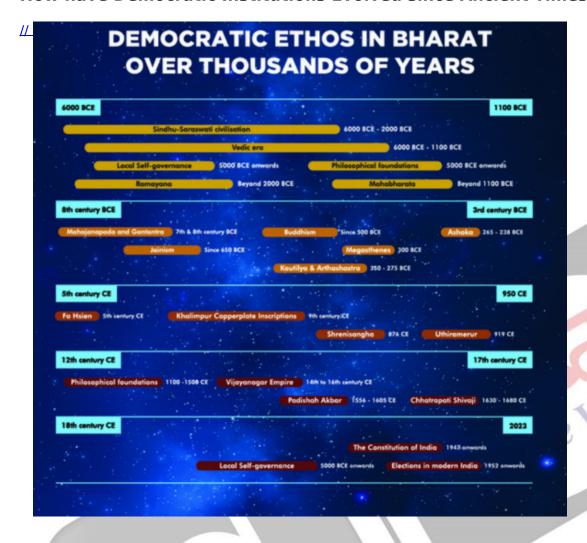
Recently the Parliament 20 (P20) summit was held in New Delhi. It is an engagement group led by the parliamentary speakers of the <u>G20</u> countries. It aims to bring a parliamentary dimension to global governance under the theme "Parliaments for One Earth, One Family, One Future."

The event included an exhibition called "Mother of Democracy," highlighting India's ancient democratic traditions and values. India's democratic legacy, emphasizes the importance of equality, harmony, freedom, acceptability, and inclusivity, which have been integral to Indian culture from ancient times to the present.

## How is India the Mother of Democracy?

- Ancient Concept:
  - Democracy has a **long and deeply rooted history** in India. This underscores the idea that **democratic principles** are not new to the Indian subcontinent.
    - The relationship between the **ruler and the ruled**, has been considered similar to that of a **father and progeny**.
  - The concept of Dharma (duty) is crucial in Indian democracy, encompassing the obligations of both the king (Raja Dharma) and the people (Praja Dharma).
- Core Values:
  - Indian democracy's core values—<u>harmony</u>, freedom, acceptability, equality, and inclusivity—underpin citizens' dignified lives;
  - Familial importance is seen in democratic family structures, with inclusive decisionmaking; women's participation in assemblies reflects inclusivity in early democratic processes.
  - India's democratic foundation, rooted in history and societal values, emphasizes enduring democratic principles guided by Dharma, shaping the roles of both the rulers and the ruled:
  - The historical tradition of participatory democracy underscores public involvement in selecting and approving rulers, highlighting the ruler's likability and the importance of public consent, mirroring a caring father ensuring the people's welfare.
- Philosophical Foundation Of Democracy:
  - Democratic-Spiritual-Social ethos: The Ancient Indian scripture, Rigveda, states: Ekam Sad Vipra Bahudha Vadanti-"The Supreme Reality is One, the sages call Him by various names."
    - "Equality is the soul of democracy. Philosophers, saints and poets across India

## **How have Democratic Institutions Evolved since Ancient Times?**



- Public Participation in the Vedic Era(6000 BCE 1100 BCE):
  - The <u>four Vedas</u> (Rigveda, Atharvaveda, Samveda, and Yajurveda) encompass a comprehensive civilizational value system, including political, societal, and educational principles.
    - The **Rigveda**, the **world's oldest composition**, and the **Atharvaveda** mention representative bodies like Sabha, Samiti, and Sansad, terms still in use today.
- Democratic Governance in Epics:
  - The Ramayana emphasizes governance for people's welfare, as seen in Rama's unanimous selection as king for Ayodhya.
  - The Mahabharata, highlighting Dharma, addresses ethics, morality, and governance, notably in Bhishma's advice to Yudhishthira on the battlefield, with the <u>Bhagavad</u> <u>Gita</u> offering ancient guidance on duties.
- Mahajanpada And Gantantra(7th And 8th Century BCE):
  - People's collective governance, a key feature in ancient Indian systems, manifested in Mahajanapada governance models: 15 Kingships with a council and 10 Republics where the Head was elected.
  - Texts like <u>Ashtadhyayi</u> highlight 'Loktantrik' institutions Gana, Puga, Nigama, lanapada.
- Jainism:
  - Jainism, dating back to the 7th century BCE, promotes pluralism through Anekanatavada, acknowledging that truth has multiple facets. This fosters coexistence and tolerance, aligning with democratic principles.
  - With non-violence as a core tenet, Jainism advocates peaceful co-existence, still

followed in India today.

#### Buddhism (Since 500 BCE):

Bauddha Sangha, founded by Gautama Buddha in the 5th century BCE, exemplified early democratic practices. This monk community upheld Buddhist doctrines and democratic traditions, promoting open discussions and elections for leaders. Buddhist principles continue to shape democratic values in India.

#### The People's Leader:

- Early India embraced participatory governance, electing a Mahasammatta (Great Elect) in the face of anarchy. The King, chosen by the people in a great hall, ruled as 'Vasettha' (head) for their protection in the Ganarajya, or People's State.
- Buddhism's democratic principles influenced rulers, ensuring the adoption of democratic values in kingdoms. Inscriptions urged regular elections for prosperity and prevention of decline.

#### Kautilya & Arthashastra(350 - 275 BCE)

- Democracy prioritizes citizens, as emphasized in Arthashastra, a 3rd-century BCE governance treatise by <u>Kautilva</u>, advisor to Chandragupta Maurya.
- It asserts the **ruler's happiness and welfare depend on the people's well-being**, embodying India's enduring democratic principle of serving, not ruling.

## Megasthenes and Diodorus Siculus' Records(300 BCE)

 Ancient Greeks noted democratic governance in various states. Indians had a commendable custom: no one as a slave, ensuring equal liberty. Global slavery ended 150 years ago, true democracy excludes it. But, India had never embraced slavery.

#### Ashoka's Governance (265 - 238 BCE)

- A state embodies democracy when equal rights and respect, protected by the law, ensure people's welfare.
- Emperor Ashoka, post his victory in Kalinga, established such governance, promoting
  peace and wellbeing through systematic ministerial elections every five years. His ideals
  endure in India's national emblem, symbolizing democracy.

## ■ Fa Xian's Records, 5<sup>th</sup> century CE:

 Democracy empowers officials to serve the people. Fa Xian observed Indian respect for people, Rule of Law, and public welfare.

#### Khalimpur Copperplate, 9. century CE:

 Gopala was elected by people to replace unfit ruler. Inscriptions highlight the end of disorder and the principle of justice.

## Shrenisangha System, 876 CE:

 Democratic administration in India involves electing and holding accountable administrative officials, including guilds and town leaders.

#### Uthiramerur Inscriptions, 919 CE:

• Inscriptions in South India's **Uthiramerur temple**, from ruler Parantaka Chola I, affirm democratic elections and local self-governance a thousand years ago.

#### Vijay Nagar Empire's Governance:

Sarv-sammati' is the democratic foundation, exemplified by Vijayanagar in South India, where Krishnadeva Raya's participatory governance, division into mandalams, nadus, and sthlas, emphasized self-governance at the village level—a model state for the people's benefit.

#### Padishah Akbar (1556 - 1605 CE)

- Padishah Akbar (1556 1605 CE) practiced inclusive governance, introducing "Sulh-i-Kul" to combat religious discrimination.
- He fostered harmony with the syncretic religion "Din-i-Ilahi" and 'Ibadat Khana.'
   Navaratna counsellors aided pro-people initiatives, showcasing Akbar's advanced democratic ideals.

## Chhatrapati Shivaji(1630-1680 CE)

 Chhatrapati Shivaji (1630-1680 CE), founder of the Maratha Empire, advocated for democratic governance. His Agya Patra outlined duties for the Ashtha-Pradhan, ensuring equal rights. Shivaji's lokatantra legacy persisted through his successors.

#### ■ The Constitution Of India (1947 Onwards):

- India's Constitution, crafted by the diverse Constituent Assembly led by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, establishes a modern, democratic Republic.
- It outlines the powers and relationships of the Legislature, Judiciary, and Executive,

- ensuring equality and universal suffrage.
- With numerous amendments, the Constitution evolves to resonate with the people, embracing inclusivity in a three-tier system of Union, States, and Local Self-Government.

## • Elections In Modern India (1952 Onwards):

- India, a **pillar of global democracy,** has experienced **17 national elections**, 400+ state elections, and over a million local self-government elections since independence.
- The <u>Election Commission</u>, an independent body reporting to the President, ensures peaceful transfers of power, reflecting India's deep-rooted democratic ethos across all levels of governance.

## What are the Sources that Help in Rediscovering Indian Democracy?

- Rich Literary Heritage: Mahabharat and Ramayan, India's epics, greatly influence the concepts of democracy and dharma in Indian culture, serving as enduring sources of wisdom.
- Democratic Values: India's democratic principles have persisted throughout its history, even through challenging times. The influence of both Western and traditional values has contributed to the modern Indian democratic system.
- Continuity of Values: Despite historical challenges, India has retained its democratic spirit, and this spirit is reflected in its democratic structures, including the Constitution and governance practices.

## What Role can India play as the Mother of Democracy?

## • Nurturing values:

India can play a crucial role as the "Mother of Democracy," nurturing fundamental values through its diverse cultural heritage. The country's rich history, influenced by epics like Mahabharat and Ramayan, contributes to the cultivation of democratic principles and enduring ethical values.

#### Public awareness:

India can play a crucial role as the "Mother of Democracy" by fostering public awareness.
 With a rich democratic heritage, the nation serves as a beacon for promoting civic engagement, political participation, and a deeper understanding of democratic principles among its citizens.

## Modern education:

 India, as the Mother of Democracy in modern education, promotes democratic principles through a curriculum fostering critical thinking, inclusivity, and civic engagement, shaping generations with a strong democratic foundation.

## Global leadership in forums like G20:

- India's commitment aligns with G20 goals of economic stability and sustainable development. India's democratic ethos advocates open dialogue, human rights, and inclusive policies, contrasting with some global players.
- India amplifies developing nations' voices, promoting equitable representation and diverse perspectives in decision-making. India underscores the global importance of democratic values, shaping discussions and policies for international cooperation and understanding.

#### India's Leadership:

 India's presidency of the G20 reflects its commitment to democratic values and international cooperation. The country aims to lead by example and promote global democratic principles.

## Collective Strength:

• India's progress and vision are **grounded in the collective strength** of its people. The focus is on the **power of collaboration, consensus**, and unity to overcome challenges and achieve national and global goals.

## **Conclusion:**

The Parliament 20 (P20) Summit in New Delhi showcased India's rich democratic heritage and core

values to the world. The emphasis on inclusivity, equality, and harmony is central to Indian democracy.

India's role in the G20 demonstrates its **commitment to democratic principles** and its belief in the collective strength of its people to address global challenges. The country is **working to inspire future generations** to embrace these timeless democratic values through **education and public awareness initiatives.** 

## **UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)**

## Prelims:

- Q. Which one of the following factors constitutes the best safeguard of liberty in a liberal democracy? (2021)
- (a) A committed judiciary
- (b) Centralization of powers
- (c) Elected government
- (d) Separation of powers

## <u>Mains</u>

Q.The ancient civilization in Indian sub-continent differed from those of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Greece in that its culture and traditions have been preserved without a breakdown to the present day. Comment. (2015)

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