



Perspective: Bharat: The Mother of Democracy

For Prelims: Indian [Democracy](#), [G20 Summit](#), P20 Summit, [Public Digital Platform](#), [SDGs](#)

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 [G20](#) countries. It aims to bring a **parliamentary dimension to global governance** under the **theme "Parliaments for One Earth, One Family, One Future."**

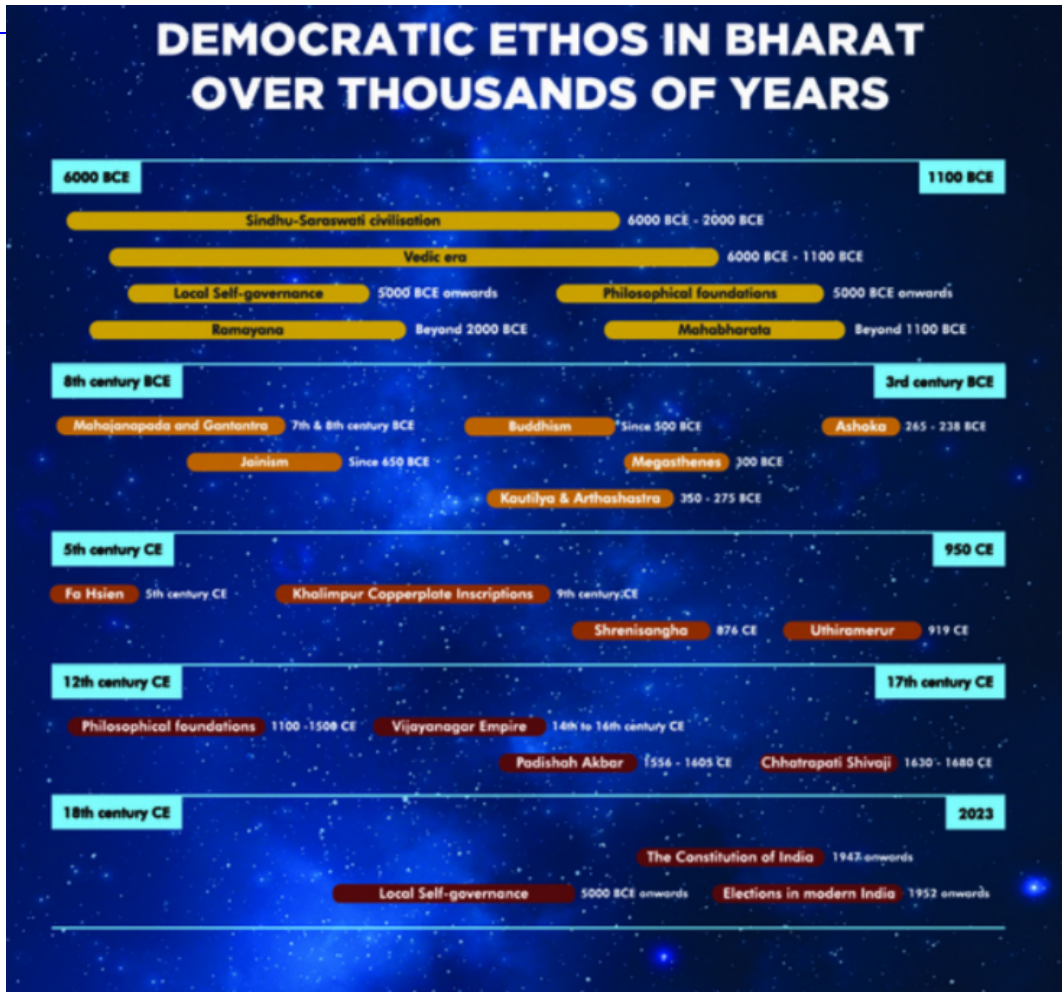
- The event included an **exhibition called "Mother of Democracy,"** highlighting India's ancient democratic traditions and values. India's democratic legacy, emphasizes the importance of [equality](#), [harmony](#), [freedom](#), [acceptability](#), and [inclusivity](#), which have been integral to 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—[harmony](#), [freedom](#), [acceptability](#), [equality](#), and [inclusivity](#)—underpin citizens' dignified lives;
 - Familial importance is seen in democratic family structures, with **inclusive decision-making; 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

recognised this and preached its importance over centuries.

How have Democratic Institutions Evolved since Ancient Times?



- **Public Participation in the Vedic Era(6000 BCE - 1100 BCE):**
 - The **four Vedas** (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 Yudhishtira** on the battlefield, with the **Bhagavad Gita** offering ancient guidance on duties.
- **Mahajanapada 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 **Ashtadhyayi** highlight '**Loktantrik**' institutions - Gana, Puga, Nigama, Janapada.
- **Jainism:**
 - Jainism, dating back to the 7th century BCE, **promotes pluralism** through **Anekanatavada**, acknowledging that **truth has multiple facets**. This fosters co-existence 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 '**Vaseththa**' (**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 [Kautilya](#), **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, 5th 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 sthals**, 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 **Election Commission**, 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

Mains

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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