

Indian Politics: Haunted by Spectre of Post-democracy?

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Abstract

The dawn of 21st century has witnessed some new features of democratic politics that seem to be shifting away from what we call democratic. The impact of globalisation has created such a nexus among elites of politics–corporates–media that has made political regimes to ignore the democratic norms and well-being of common masses and overemphasise economic growth and corporate-friendly policy priorities. Besides, the approach of the political actors (parties and politicians), in the process of power-seeking, has shown unconventional trends. These features do not resemble either dictatorship or totalitarianism; rather they depict trends of aristocratic mode of decision-making by using democratic framework and institutions. Such trends have been termed as ‘post-democracy’ by recent Western scholarship.

Indian politics is not an exception. These trends have created an imbalance between interest of social classes and corporative interests which has prompted political regimes to take tough decisions, in despotic ways. Though the present article does not posit that Indian democracy is on the brink, it attempts to underline the post-democratic features visible in Indian politics through examination of (a) party politics in terms of democratic framework, ideology, policy initiations and reforms, electioneering, etc.; (b) politicians–corporates–media nexus; and (c) modes and trends of politicians in communicating and relating with the electorate.

Keywords

Democratic consolidation, post-democracy, party politics, corporations, media

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Introduction

Post-globalisation period has witnessed changes in the functioning of democracy in the entire world in general and in India in particular. Democratic politics has been shifting gradually from substantial to symbolic democracy and encompassing despotic trends in its garb, namely using democratic institutions and frames and even go beyond 'truth', 'facts' and 'norms' in order to woo voters. Not only this, they create events every now and then through eventful policy announcements to make people hopeful of magical achievements which the journalists have termed as 'post-truth politics', 'post-fact politics' and 'eventocracy'.¹ In India, the electoral structures and systems have been manifesting such public opinion that seems to have gone beyond what is called democratic. These trends in electoral system push the voters into Faustian corner.² In other words, voters become destined to accept all odds. The politicians have been offering them the periodic opportunity to challenge the establishment but limiting their choices by straitjacketing this challenge into conduits managed and controlled by establishment itself. The nexus among politician–corporate–media elites has further been fortified for acquisition/retention of power that goes beyond democratic norms but is done by co-opting democratic institutions.

The major factor leading to the changes has been the growing (facilitation) role of corporate world in governing process. This is for two reasons—ensuring prospects of fast economic growth in the country and accruing financial support to the political actors. This has brought a striking paradigmatic shift in Indian politics, surfaced in recent past, namely, preferring economic growth over welfare measures, experts over institutions, oligarchic party framework over democratic framework, preference for aristocratic over democratic decision-making, corporate-driven economic growth over social justice, electoral prospects over values and ideology, personal life over issues in propaganda, high profile propaganda over policy options, information technology over democratic processes, dynasticism over lower-level party functionaries and so on. These paradigmatic shifts in functioning of democracy need to be underlined and analysed in order to understand the changed complexions of Indian politics. Indian politics seems to have been haunted by spectres of post-democracy. As such the present article is a modest attempt to trace the 'post-democracy' features in Indian politics. The attempt is based on two basic questions—how democracy is turning into formalism from substantive? And why the delicate balance between democracy and capitalism is becoming skewed such that capitalism seems to hogging primacy?

However, the issues raised in the present article are not quite new. Some similar inferences have been drawn earlier by Atul Kohli (1991, 2006) and many other contributors in the context of success of Indian democracy amidst odds even in terms of development and inclusiveness. The challenges of governability have also been traced out. These studies have also indicated the trends of aristocratic decision-making by political regimes. The emerging queer characteristics of Indian democracy have been marked by the studies of Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS 2015). Intention of political leaders for foreign investment resulting into links with corporate world has been marked by Rudolph and Rudolph (2008). Besides, a grassroots-level study by Geffrey Witsoe (2013)

underlines that the working of grassroots democracy, even after introduction of seventy-third constitutional amendment, has gone against development owing to aristocratic decisions by local elite structure. It shows how increase in democratic participation by even lower castes has radically threatened the patronage state by systematically weakening its institutions and disrupting its development projects.³ Author in his earlier studies on rural leadership has also found that those, who come in power, intend to dominate in decision-making and flout democratic norms (Verma, 1991, 2009).

Post-democracy: Theoretical Considerations

Owing to growing interventions of market forces in policy priorities, there has been shifts in governance process that ignore the interest of the common people. Some Western social and political scientists, such as Colin Crouch (2004, 2016) and Robert Rorty (2004), have termed this paradigmatic shift in democracy as 'post-democracy'. To these scholars, the emerging features of working of democracy in developed countries are queer in nature that can be called neither democratic nor totalitarian. The basic framework of democracy remains the same, but the operation of democracy has acquired some new features. To make it more clear, it implies that something new has come into existence to reduce the importance of democracy. However, democracy has still left its mark and strong traces around, hence 'post-democracy'. Though such trends have co-existed with democracy, its intensity at present has gone up. Democratic functioning should be considered in terms of 'democratic consolidation' or 'consolidation of democracy'.

Democratic Consolidation

In order to mark the 'running evolution' in democratic functioning, it becomes pertinent to have an idea on measuring democracy in terms of its consolidation. Though it was quite difficult to gauge democracy empirically, scholarship on the subject has attempted it on the basis of the operative part of democracy.⁴ They have underlined the following indicators of a consolidated democracy: (a) Formation of government through open competitive contest with guarantee of democratic rights and liberties; in other words, government formation is acceptable to all (Mainwaring, O'Donnell & Valenzuela, 1992); (b) legitimacy in operations of democracy with people's greater political participation and political justice; (c) moreover, democratic institutions reconcile diverse societal interests; (d) people and political leaders have conviction in democratic methods (Linz, 1990); and (e) democratic institutions are ingrained in political culture and there is transfer of power from one elected government to another (Huntington, 1991).

Post-democracy

The backdrop

But instead of these features, democracies have tended to shift towards the new oligarchy-oriented features. These shifts have generated increased interest since

2008 owing to the Great Economic Recession in the West. It is about the order in which an oligarchy, using some democratic narrative, systematically pushes people from politics and directs them towards other spheres of life or towards the plurality of consumer society (Kursar, 2013). Robert Rorty (2004) believes that 'democracy will change, but it will be neither a dictatorship nor totalitarianism, but, first of all, a benevolent despotism which will be gradually imposed by the hereditary nomenclature.' A despot governs by his or her own will and caprice. The point of difference of present benevolent despotism from that of pre-democratic era lies in the fact that it is practiced in garb of democratic framework.

Tenets of the theory

Colin Crouch has coined the term by his write-up published as a book on 'Post-democracy' in 2004, though he admits it being a polemical concept. He posits that the period of glory of democracy has started fading and declining capacity of the welfare state has weakened democracy. This is caused by crucial imbalance between corporative interests and interest of social classes as well as corporate interest has been institutionalised. Politics as such is practically left to 'a closed elite'. It has created a condition in which the interest of empowered minority became much more important than those of ordinary people. He further claims that political elites have learnt to manipulate with needs of ordinary people and considers it as poor health of democracy in which there are transactions between politicians and corporate, over-dependency on mass media/technologies and growing significance of active powerful minorities. He perceives it also in social perspective.⁵ To him, a post-democratic society therefore is one that continues to have and to use all the institutions of democracy, but in which they increasingly become a formal shell. The energy and innovative drive pass away from the democratic arena and into small circles of politico-economic elite.

Operative perspectives of the theory

The discussions on 'post-democracy' by scholarship on the subject can be summed-up in the following perspectives—party politics, policy preferences and reforms, nexus between political and corporate elites, media-democracy relationship, and media-corporate nexus. Let us present these perspectives in the following way. (a) In context of party politics, it has been found that political parties, in quest for new identity, invite experts and corporate interventions, resulting into increased business links and decreased parties' affiliation to defined social classes (Crouch, 2004, 2016). In a post-democracy situation, political parties face de-alignment of voters and growing scepticism among the citizenry resulting into widening democratic deficit at the national level. The political parties focus on maximising electoral gains instead of participative activities and ideologies. In the process, people are kept aloof from agenda setting, party organisation⁶ and political communication⁷ (Dommett, 2016). (b) Crouch finds financial crisis as a motoring force for political parties to adopt rescue measures like protecting corporate interests. He opines that as a result, global corporations⁸ garner a new level of influence over governments, on the one hand, and governments, for

minimising unemployment and economic instability, support corporations by liberalising regulations, reduction in taxes and framing corporate-friendly policies on the other hand. Global corporations adept at shaping regulatory environment (Palmer, 2016). (c) Under conditions of post-democracy, the relationship between democracy and media hinged on a conception of independent journalism in the public interest, political participation and democratic renewal are changed and undone (Fenton, 2016). Relationship between political and media elites constrains media reform debates and democratic culture in view of 'systematic monetarisation of news and concentration of media ownership' leading to the predominance of pro-business coverage of policymaking and elections (Fenton, 2016). Further, it has been posited that to a post-democracy, characterised by increasing deregulation of corporate media interests, the media's accountability is lost and the logic of capital becomes the sole driver of commercial newspaper practice (Fenton, 2016). (d) In post-democracy conditions, a situation arises in which communities do not have understanding to a diverse range of media, political systems and corporate pressures as there is a lack of non-profit public interest news media. In the process, the media flashes post-truth and hate-speeches of election propaganda without considering their accountability to democracy.

Trends in Indian Politics: Haunted by Post-democracy

A host of scholars, who have examined the working of Indian democracy in the last two–three decades, have marked the dwindling democratic features in Indian politics. The studies by the Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS, 2015) in its pioneer research venture based on empirical enquiry, has marked the queer nature of working of democracies in South Asia in general and India in particular, with the beginning of the 21st century. The study, in comparison to its earlier study in 2005, finds the Indian democracy as a formal democracy. To quote from the study,

India's democracy is a complex story. The terrain of Indian politics is replete with democratic elements, sub-democratic manifestations and non-democratic punctuations that make its story engaging, challenging and intriguing all at the same time. All these complications reflect, not only in the practice of democracy, but also in popular assessments of democracy.

It posits that 'there is puzzling coexistence of democratic and non-democratic tendencies, as well as the coexistence of formal democracy along with a weak entrenchment of the democratic ethic' (CSDS, 2015). Rudolph and Rudolph (2008) have examined the 50 years of working of Indian democracy in its various perspectives and indicated that the state in India has developed trends of attempting to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) including corporate world. Besides, Rudolphs have also pointed out the effective and positive role of caste/community associations in the working of Indian democracy. In addition, an edited work by Kanchan Chandra (2016) has given a clear picture on the pervasiveness of dynastic politics in India in the 21st century. The contributors to the book have

underlined that the political dynasties that exist in India are a product of democracy in India. It has been argued that the aristocracy learned how to make democratic appeals, while the democrats learned how to draw on tradition and history to garner votes. It concludes that the democratic dynasts are going strong, seemingly proving immune to modernisation. As a result, people continue to prefer dynasts over non-dynasts.

In last two decades, the glaring changes in pattern of Indian democratic politics can be categorised into following—(a) political parties shift to undemocratic corners under the democratic umbrella, reflected through lack of inner party democracy, decline of ideology and values, criminalisation of politics, aristocratic decision-making and dynastic trends, etc. Political leaders operate aristocratically but under the democratic framework; (b) nexus between corporate and political elites results into corporate-friendly policies and legislations ignoring welfare and reducing subsidies; (c) there is institutionalisation of experts in taking tough decisions thereby ignoring people's agony; (d) political campaigns are more like pattern of corporate advertising as parties have nothing new to choose for its electorate; (e) media play as political tool and serve the interests of the corporate and (f) private lives of politicians become important tool of electioneering by ignoring issues and values. Though the post-democracy features are not peculiar to developing countries, the changing complexions of politics in India can be underlined as new features of democracy. Let us begin with the political parties.

Political Parties: Interfacing Democracy-deficit

The nature of Indian political parties has changed a lot in terms of organisation, leadership, and citizens' political participation in last two decades. Parties are now operating oligarchically but under democratic framework. Every political party—national or regional—has developed tendency of autocratic leadership and adopts top-down approach in policy preference and agenda setting. Despite India having the 'single dominant party system' during early decades of independence, the Congress party practiced inner party democracy. Similarly, other political parties resorted to parties' inner democracy. The Janata Party during 1977–80 had a democratic mode of decision-making as four opposition parties had coalesced to form one party and took decision by consensus. However, decision-making process in Congress changed into authoritarian modes since Indira Gandhi took the charge of it and onwards.

The organisation of the political parties in India have constitutionally bottom-up democratic structures but this is hardly observed. Gowda and Sridharan observe that

in almost all parties, internal elections are stage-managed by the leadership, often with "consensus" candidates chosen without contest, to the extent of mere formality. Nowadays, most parties observe some perfunctory rituals of internal democracy for the sake of formality, as certain practices are mandated by the Election Commission of India for maintaining a party's official recognition.

The parties' core decision-making bodies are rarely drawn from the lower-level party activists which amounts to lack of inner party democracy. By studying the nature of political parties such as Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). Rudolph and Rudolph find that almost all Indian political parties have developed tendency of persistent centralism making it difficult to mark them as either leftist or rightist.⁹ The elites of the parties nominate those persons of their choice at the top ranks who obey them habitually. Even the state leadership of national parties are nominated by 'high command' (central leadership). There is a trend of authorising party chief for all crucial decisions by their executive committees, the loyalists of the party chief. It has been seen that even regional parties, such as Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIDMK), Trinamool Congress (TMC), Telugu Desham Party (TDP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Samajwadi Party (SP), etc., have authoritarian leadership in their respective parties who take decisions single handed and make it look democratic by following the democratic formalities. Their links from the lower rungs of the party organisation are not effective as there is top-down mechanism of decision-making. National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution has rightly observed that

leadership in most political parties in India may be democratic in appearance but highly oligarchic in reality. Frequent rifts between the National and State party organisations in almost all national parties suggest that highly integrated party structures may soon no longer be appropriate and we may be led to the realisation that a national party should not be over-centralised, still less personalised.¹⁰

M.P. Singh (2016) does also mark the role of a towering and strong personality in upsurge of BJP in recent years. He writes,

The victory of the BJP at the head of the rump National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was largely attributed to the 'presidential' campaign and the personal popularity of the BJP prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi The Ministerial colleagues cutting across factional and party lines in the BJP-led NDA have meekly fallen in line under Modi's command.

Another point of lack of inner party democracy is growing dynastic political recruitment in the parties. Moreover, Chandra's analysis, also concludes that dynasticism has emerged as semi-democratic element in Indian democracy. Though her analysis reflects proto-democratic impact (like what Rudolphs proposed), it indicates that these dynastic political recruits inhibit the hard workers of parties to ladder up in the party hierarchy.

Another indicator of inner party democracy is pattern of sharing power structure in the party in shape of acquiring candidature in elections and commanding positions in party organisation. India's political parties have evolved less on ideological lines and more as amorphous collections of political activists coming together for the sake of winning elections, often rallying around an ethnic or identity-based agenda. The allotment of party tickets, during general elections, is strictly monitored by the high command. The key exceptions would be the cadre-based parties of the Right and the Left. Other political parties' internal organisations

are not usually disciplined enough nor do they provide clear paths to political growth for ambitious activists. The dynastic politicians acquire higher rank and file in the party organisation and executive posts. Rahul Gandhi of Congress, Akhilesh Yadav of Samajwadi Party, sons of Lalu Prasad, Tejaswi and Tej Pratap of Rashtriya Janata Dal are the burning examples. The imperative of securing electoral victory has led parties to launch a wide search for candidates, using 'winnability' as the key criterion. Over time, a large number of Indian political parties are becoming dynastic, family-controlled or bossed over by a supremo.

Parties and Policy-making: Institutionalising Experts

Putting various social issues on political agenda is one of the major functions of political parties in a democratic system. It can be posited that agenda-setting are now not the outcome of feedback from lower-level party functionaries, rather of relying more on suggestions of experts. These trends result in democracy-deficit. For example, the recent policies, such as demonetisation, cashless transactions, over-emphasis on land acquisition, scrapping the Planning Commission of India and setting up National Institute of Transforming India Aayog (NITI Aayog) and launching several programmes, such as 'Make in India' Start-Up and Digital India, without assessing their suitability to present social needs and Indian conditions. The episode of decision and implementation of demonetisation, by Modi government, reveals that 'the manner in which this decision has been implemented highlights the importance of institutionalising lateral entry of experts into the upper echelons of our economic and technical ministries, a la, US system' (Mehta, 2017). In states also, a similar pattern has been practised, namely Nitish-led government of Bihar scrapped the State Planning Board (of course, it was not functioning properly) and appointed one Prashant Kishor as expert to suggest policy measures. For instance, the farmers' plight has been largely ignored because of growing corporate needs. The seriousness of farmers' problems, which has been largely ignored, can be judged by certain facts. According to National Crime Records Bureau, 3,000 farmers have committed suicides across the country in the year 2015 alone due to debt and bankruptcy, of whom 80 per cent had taken loans from banks or microfinance institutions (*The Sunday Express*, 2017). Experts suggesting policy measures have no idea of rural scenario, particularly of the people engaged in agriculture; hence, they are unable to take care of the farmers. However, the lower-level party functionaries are aware but they are not taken in confidence while launching any policy. There can be found much more evidences to support this proposition. As such, the author is convinced and it may widely be accepted that the new pattern of agenda-setting goes against the participatory democratic norms and features. Hitherto, the political parties were central pillars of communities and spoke directly through local branches to citizens, but now the political elites with their local functionaries, have become more reliant on experts' suggestions, new technologies and media in order to communicate their message than the lower level functionaries of parties.

Party Politics: Decline of Ideology

It is an established fact that a political party is identified by its ideology with which it seeks to work for well-being of the people. Democracy requires party's adherence to clear ideology and programmes. Parties are differentiated on the basis of their ideological punches. But now there has been sharp erosion in the ideological orientation of the political parties; rather the parties having more concern with ideologies are dwindling, evident by the dismal performance of ideology-based Left parties in last few general elections. The electoral politics has made parties to compromise with blurred ideological boundaries for electoral prospects.

The decline of ideology in political parties is attributed to two reasons. First, the ideological issue related to liberalisation of the economy in the Indian polity has ceased to divide parties on ideological ground. The processes of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation initiated by the Congress in 1991 has acquired the status of a de facto consensus, with the reform agenda proceeding, albeit sometimes haltingly, continuously through United Front, United Progressive Alliance, and BJP-led governments. Second, the imperative of securing electoral victory has led parties to launch a wide search for candidates, using 'winnability' as the key criterion. Winnability is not measured by adherence to ideologies but the resources the candidate has to spend on elections, whether he hails from a numerically powerful caste, or has a track record of success in other fields or as a politician, or is some sort of celebrity. Locally powerful politicians, and even criminals, have emerged as candidates based on this criterion (Gowda & Sridharan, n.d.). The activists who hover around potential candidates are typically motivated by the desire to obtain power, prestige and influence, either directly for themselves, or indirectly, through the election of their leader. A leader's worth is measured by his ability to be a patron, to bend bureaucracy to his will and to obtain lucrative contracts or other income for his followers. Reflecting the decline of ideology in Indian politics, defectors also routinely find openings in other parties if they are regarded as having winnability.

The parties throw ideologies variably to encircle the vote banks in their fold. Every party claims to have commitment to development, economic growth, prosperity of youth, etc., without having any concrete programmes and performance. Even the idea of development has not been perceived well by the parties. There are several ideologies said to be pursued by the parties, namely, social justice, secularism, cultural nationalism, environmentalism, protection of oppressed classes, etc., but every party claims to have all these ideologies in their programmes. Besides, parties have shown different preferences at different places within the country itself. The parties float a host of programmes, sometimes self-contradictory. National Commission on examining the working of Indian Constitution finds that

there has been very sharp erosion in the ideological orientation of political parties. Party dynamics in India has led to the emergence of valueless politics much against the ideals of the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi Because of the falling moral standards both in the public and among the leaders; criminalisation of politics and politicization

of criminals has become the norm.... Due to degeneration of leadership, parties have been entangled in power struggle for the sake of personal ends.¹¹

Pushing the Welfare Back and Promoting Corporate Interests

In the race of economic growth, the developing countries are compelled to curtail their welfare measures and public spending for economic reasons. It is a truth and several studies in the mid-1990s posited that the developing states are suffering from four ailments—namely, financial crunch, costly service delivery, inefficiency and corruption. These ailments made the state rent-seeking and resistant to development (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1995). With the advent of globalisation, the need of cost-effective governance became the demand of the time. In the meantime, the concept of new public management has attracted governments to lean towards austerity in public spending, curtailment of the subsidies and welfare schemes in order to meet the needs of global economic changes (Hood, 1991). On the contrary, the governments have been wasting public money for attracting corporations and spend more to save less. In other words, governments become ‘penny-wise and pound-foolish’. Amit Bhaduri rightly observes,

It is rather the role of the government that has been changing rapidly in its relationship with the private sector. This can be most easily seen in terms of the question of subsidy itself. Revenue forgone on various heads by the government to help corporations is estimated roughly at ₹2.1 trillion (lakh crore or 10¹²), while subsidies to the poor are at ₹2.2 billion, the same order of magnitude during the first one and a half decades of this century (Bhaduri, 2016).

Traditional tax breaks and other revenues forgone are the conventional measures of government’s support to industry. It is justified in the name of promoting the ‘private investment climate’ under fiscal discipline of various sorts, like reducing the fiscal deficit, etc. As such, Indian politics strives for market-friendly policies at the cost of welfare schemes and subsidies for the poor. The situation has encouraged politician–corporate nexus at the cost of people’s welfare. This is glaringly undemocratic.

Nexus Between Political and Corporate Elites

Relationship between the political elite and corporate elite is not new in Indian politics. Rather it started during the freedom struggle way back in 1920s by the efforts of Mahatma Gandhi who courted businessmen for funds to meet the needs of freedom struggle. Nearly 1.3 million (the amount was very huge as compared to current value of rupees equal to nearly \$20,000) was donated by J.L. Bajaj, Godrej, stock exchange brokers, Seth Anand Poddar and grain merchants. Business and politics were intertwined in a virtuous circle.¹² During freedom struggle, the corporate sector donated under influence of patriotic feelings, not for their gains. There has been striking departure from earlier nature of businessmen–politicians relationship in the recent times is almost transactional as the political elites of India are in compulsion to become friendly with corporate sector especially the

Multinational Companies (MNCs) for two reasons: (a) corporate as assured source of funds for political parties and the election expenses; and (b) considering corporate and global firms as the engines of prosperity and economic growth.

So far as political funding by corporate sector is concerned, the nexus has grown stronger in the recent decades. The trend of nexus between political and corporate elites has grown, in post-1991 economic reforms period, in the following modes: (a) transactions in shape of accruing political funding and later liberalising regulatory instruments; (b) hiring services of 'corporate consultants' and 'media advisors'; (c) harvesting government data and intelligence for business planning in advance; and (d) establishing partnership for investment of black money for return in white. The real estate and natural resource sector is the most potential private sector for politicians. The land is the key factor in this context which is being acquired and sold out to corporate sector for construction of housing and educational institutions (based on Chandrashekhar, 2015). Amit Bhaduri (2016) writes,

The natural resources are given to the corporations at throwaway prices in the name of industrialisation. In effect, this is a huge transfer of public wealth to private corporations...India's way has been creating multibillionaires through allocation of land and natural resources snatched from the poorest, with around 40 per cent of the displaced being Adivasis and Dalits, according to government reports.

He further argues that the land acquisition has doubled since late 1990s as compared to the period of forty-five years since Independence. Not only this, sizeable chunk (over 40 per cent) of acquired land is still unused.

In the wake of accruing benefit of country's economic growth from the corporate world, the global firms garner a new level of influence as they are supposed to minimise unemployment and economic instability and in return the politicians in governments support them by reducing taxes and allowing flexibilities in regulating their affairs with a view to make the country 'ride the globalisation wave' (Palmer, 2016). Indian business could use politicians to get particularistic benefits, on the one hand, and politicians get access to a huge pool of funds from corporate (apart from trivial public contributions on the other hand). This will be evident from the fact that after 2003, businessmen were allowed tax incentives for their donations. Nature of relationship further changed in a way that these donations have continued to take a form of black money and politicians attempted to conceal the source of funding. Gowda and Sridharan conclude that 'Maintaining confidentiality of donations helps avoid reprisals by political parties that might want to penalise the donors for favouring their opponents; this is generally regarded as more important than any tax benefits.' The recent verdict of Central Information Commission declaring political parties as public institutions for declaration of income has created a fuss as the political parties irrespective of ideologies have filed cases in Supreme Court against the judgement. They have also endeavoured to curb the RTI Act in their favour.¹³

There are much more evidences of this nexus reflected through the following statistics. Donations received by BJP have gone up from ₹146.2 million in 2010–11 to 828.2 million in 2012–13 as compared to that of Congress from ₹80.2 million to 114.2 million. Left parties fared bad as donations to them has

reduced to one third during the period. It will be more interesting to note that Congress topped in receiving donations during the period from 2004 to 2011, almost double of that of BJP evident from the fact that Congress earned ₹20.08 billion as against 9.94 billion by BJP (ADR & NEW, 2012; *The Times of India*, 2014). The figures of donations to the political parties depict that *the amount of donations increased with the increasing electoral prosperity of a party*. The transactional relationship between political elites and business elites can also be read by the recent policy preferences and flexibility provided to the corporate sector by the Indian government and state governments. Frequent announcements of policies regarding reduction in interest rates on loans, offering land and other infrastructural facilities in favour of corporate sector (namely, land acquisition bill), permanent residency, etc., are the burning examples. The state government of Bihar has recently raised the subsidy up to ₹100 million to the investors in industrial sector under *audyogik protsahan niti* and provision of financial support up to 1 million. Besides, the party in power placate the media by granting huge amount of advertisements out of public exchequer. Recently, the Bihar Government has come to revise 'advertisement policy' for fixing rates, etc.

Change in Media-democracy Relationship

In 2005, the yearly World Press Freedom Day international conference produced a declaration that stressed that 'independent and pluralistic media are essential for ensuring transparency, accountability and participation as fundamental elements of good governance and human-rights based development'.¹⁴ This is the normative role of media for a sound democracy. But the changed role of media in the 21st century has been read to be working the other way. In recent times, the relationship between democracy and media has changed from accountability to the people to the business interests; from knowledge dissemination, renewal of democracy, vehicle of social change and inspiration for participation to vehicle of serving the interests of the owners of media. A study has marked the connection of corporate and political elites with media.¹⁵ Media has also resorted to negative publicity and particularised political propaganda in developing countries (Fenton, 2016). Particularly during Indian general elections, it has turned its face friendly to political elites and business community instead of playing the role of being mechanism of people's political education. Several issues, in the context of media's role that need to be underlined here, are—volume of expenses by political actors on publicity, media's biased twisting facts (the trends such as selection, suppression and booming), opinion polls and political use of social media.

It has been found that in general elections held in last 10 years there has been huge spending in electioneering through media. A report of ASSOCHAM (a forum of industries and commerce in India) finds that a whopping amount has been spent by political parties in the general election of 2014. It estimates the expenditure between ₹40 billion and 50 billion and finds that 30 per cent of the total election expenditure has gone to media publicity of which 10 per cent of the total amount was spent on social media itself (Dutt, 2014). There was a news based on unofficial reporting which claimed that BJP alone spent ₹1,200 million in 2014 general elections. This raises serious concerns about the trivialisation of

content and the impact of the increasing concentration of media ownership in the hands of large corporate groups. Since most of the media are privately owned and driven by profit motives, commercial compulsions, distort the free and fair dissemination of information. Though there are legal regulatory mechanisms to control media, the process of liberalisation and upper hand of politicians in power make the mechanisms toothless.¹⁶ These regulatory instruments have been considered as colonial and resistant to democracy. Besides, a National Information Policy 1985 was issued. But in the wake of economic reforms and fierce criticism and counter-criticism of politicians, the issue of control over media has been shelved and shadowed.

These days, media have been twisting facts and manufacturing dissent to a particular group of political actors. For example, in a recent case some media houses and editors have dubbed the 10-year rule of UPA as a 'wasted decade' completely shunning its positive contributions. Nonetheless, the media did not care to highlight the significant steps taken during this period regarding poverty alleviation initiatives (Like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), strengthening of democracy by introducing right to information as well as education, etc. Zoya Hassan (2014) rightly observes, 'In one stroke the whole past has been demolished, but the media did not challenge this, as a matter of fact, it has lent credence to this by simply repeating the perversion of India's contemporary history.' There is a disinclination to ask hard questions and to critically examine the authenticity of the themes and issues of a campaign. Media freedom is sacrosanct despite mounting evidence of distortions like 'paid news', 'coverage packages', 'private treaties' with big corporations and 'doctored opinion polls', not to mention a tilt to the right in all media platforms, including satire, spoof and parody. The recent decision to ban *NDTV* for one day is another example of the phenomenon.

The issue of opinion polls is also a concern of media's role turning into market orientation. International experience has shown that these are most accurate way of measuring party support base. In India, despite being introduced in 1980s, the emergence of 24-hour news channels during the end of 1990s and in the beginning of the 21st century witnessed further growth of the opinion poll industry in India and the media started engaging various market research organisations to conduct polls during the elections. Some market research agencies like A C Nielson and ORG-Marg, Centre for Media Studies, C-Voter, etc., entered into the field also. The industry of opinion/exit polls have flourished during last one and half decades. The large number of surveys conducted among the Indian electorates during last one decade is a testimony to industry in the country. The last three general elections held in the year 2004, 2009 and 2014 show a fierce competition in the Indian media for conducting pre-poll surveys and exit polls. The widespread perception about the opinion polls surveys is that the forecasts might influence voters, especially the undecided. People also feel that some of the surveys, if not all, are not objective because they are sponsored by the interested parties. In November 2013, after getting fresh support from various political parties, the Election Commission has obtained ban on opinion polls from the date of notification of elections from the Ministry of Law and Justice. The noted psephologist, Yogendra Yadav has expressed his opposition to it: 'Any attempt at banning opinion polls will simply open up a black-market of information...opinion polls

will still be conducted. They will be conducted because politicians will need it, they will be conducted because parties desperately need it, newspapers and media channels need it' (Kumar, 2014). The nexus is transactional.

The information technology revolution (ITR) has created a large scope of people for interacting with social media like Facebook, Twitter, blogs, LinkedIn, etc. This has been, in recent years, overwhelmingly used for political/election purposes. The Western democracy has witnessed its deep impact on the political mind of the people, so is the case with India. However, the influence of social media requires to be probed and regulated.

Hate-comments on Private Lives: Effective Tool of Election Campaign

The arrogant election propaganda has become a global phenomenon in these days. The propaganda in recent American presidential elections is a burning example. It has witnessed the effective use of non-democratic weapons and hate-speeches by distorting facts and truth to accrue voters' support which are termed as 'post-truth', 'post-fact', 'facticide', etc. In order to catch the floating voters, politicians use private lives of opposing politicians in their election campaigns. In India, during last two decades most of political parties have been resorting to arrogant mode of propaganda and speeches which can be termed as 'blame-game'. The intensity of such modes of electioneering has been accelerated in the 21st Century. There are frequent reportings in newspapers and telecasts on electronic media (TV) about the ugly allegations referring to private lives of politicians of opposition parties. There emerged a war of words by the politicians during the electioneering and even before the elections. In a democracy, these utterances are of no avail for the common people; rather these are used to generate hatred to a particular politician by another. Generating hatred goes against democratic norms. It is not possible to refer all those ugly debates which are published every now and then. On these occasions, most of the politicians make the private lives of opponent politicians as their major content of speech.

Conclusion

The emergent trends analysed above in Indian politics seems to be closer to the spectre of 'post-democracy'. These trends go beyond democracy but retain democratic facade. The nexus of politicians–corporates–media has made the policy preferences of the political parties ignore the democratic norms and people's choices. In the wake of these effects, the role of media has also tilted towards market forces by ignoring the democratic responsibilities. As such, there have emerged trends, such as authoritarian decision-making by political elites under democratic framework, dominance of vote bank politics over ideologies/ethics of parties, undemocratic features in party politics, growing role of media in manufacturing political dissent and support, thereby ignoring the people and cutting them off from democratic processes and political participation.

Notes

1. A veteran journalist (Kumar, 2016) finds ‘Eventocracy’ as a new form of democracy where there is nothing greater than the event. Any policy announcement has so many events that people have begun to believe in the arrival of an avatar. The politician as policy announcer appears on a stage, like a divine being.
2. Referred to Marlowe’s character of Dr Faustus, a German astronomer and necromancer in 16th century who was reputed to have sold his soul to the Devil.
3. The study was conducted in Kulharia Panchayat of Bhojpur district of Bihar. For details see the study of Jeffrey Witsoe (2013). The author has had interaction with Witsoe for clarifications in August 2014.
4. Robert Dahl (1971) has made easy to gage the consolidation of democracy by underlining operative part of democracy as - healthy competition in electoral market, provision of civic and political liberties and ensuring greater degree of political participation.
5. Crouch expressed it in an interview. Retrieved from <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/five-minutes-with-colin-crouch>.
6. Organisational aspects of political parties depict -dislocation of party-public links, dominance of charismatic leadership in parties and chaos in organisation, reflected through defections, splits, emergence of new parties by influent political leaders (Dommett, 2016).
7. Parties adopt consumerist modes of political communication and rely on electronic technologies, psephological studies instead of interaction with citizens and local party functionaries.
8. The term corporation encompasses a range of corporate structures including subsidiaries, holding companies and joint ventures.
9. <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/57-yrs-and-discovering-india-padma-bhushan-mr-mrs-rudolph/#sthash.HLhit8oC.dpuf>
10. See Section 6.1 of the report of National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2001)
11. See Section 6.5 of the report of National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution, *op. cit.*
12. Ashutosh Varshney has expressed this view in, “The Business–Politics Nexus”, International Studies and Social Sciences at Brown University.
13. Based on several reporting in *The Hindu* see in reference section.
14. “World Press Freedom Day 2005; Dakar Declaration”, *UNESCO*, accessed August 08, 2012, <http://www.unesco.org/>
15. Excerpts of T N Ninan’s book *The Turn of Tortoise* (2015)—‘Mukesh Ambani of Reliance first bought and then took charge of a media company that owns a clutch of regional language TV news channels before folding that into investment in a multimedia company that ran mainstream business and English news channels. He then entered into a financing arrangement with the promoters of another TV news company that effectively gave him ownership rights whenever he wanted it. Another businessman with varied interests, Subhash Chandra, owns the Zee TV network as well as a newspaper in Mumbai. Chandra openly aligns with the BJP. Many businessmen have taken minority stakes, with no obvious control or influence, in a variety of media companies, like Kumar Mangalam Birla who is a shareholder in the India Today multimedia empire. Gautam Adani, a go-getting businessmen widely considered to be close to Narendra Modi, is a passive investor in India TV, promoted by the pro-BJP Rajat Sharma. Kalanithi Maran runs the Sun TV news and entertainment network across southern India, is the grandnephew of M Karunanidhi, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) patriarch.’ See *The Times of India* (2015).

16. Most of these mechanisms carried colonial legacy such as Official Secret Act, 1923, with minor amendments in post-Independence period and Press Council of India Act, 1965, later amended in 1978 to equip it with some power and also the Privacy Act, Customs Act and Publication of Books Act, etc., are the burning examples.

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