

Center for Promoting Democracy: Concept Note

Introduction:

India world's largest parliamentary democracy has a long history of various governance models. Since the ancient times, the region under the current Indian Subcontinent had a tradition of collective discussion and decision making through small village level councils. This ancient democratic tradition came under attack during the medieval times when monarchy gained prominence and the masses (Prajā in Hindi) gave up their collective decision-making powers to the ruling King. Thus, from a society with collective social conscience and responsibility, it was gradually transformed into one which reduced people to mute spectators to centralized decision making.

The imperial governance pattern reduced the local kings to middle men or brokers and led to the creation of a bureaucratic machinery which was far detached from the local concerns. After the independence, the newly created nation had a herculean task of unifying a highly diverse region not only consisting of multiple religions, caste, tribes but also different governance mechanisms at the regional level. The political leadership of that time understood the diversity of religion, caste, region etc. which existed within the geographical boundary of the new nation. Acknowledging this diversity and in order to allow for its vibrancy to be sustained, the leadership decided to adopt democracy as the preferred mode of governance which would allow voices to this diverse nation in making.

Democracy was understood not just as a mechanism of governing a nation but rather as a means of creation of a new social structure which challenges the existing discrimination, injustice, violence and exploitation. It was aimed towards inculcating values of justice, equity, freedom and solidarity among the diverse populace. Mahatma Gandhi had been a critique of parliamentary democracy solely as a governance model, rather he advocated for a simultaneous movement to strengthen the democratic values among the society at large. According to him this ground up process cannot be avoided rather it is non-negotiable if the true meaning of parliamentary democracy has to be achieved. Dr. Ambedkar the architect of India's constitution referred to India as a nation in making as while political equality has been achieved however the new nation has a huge challenge of ensuring societal and economic equality which required massive constructive structural processes or movements of change to be initiated.

Theoretically, the expected trajectory of parliamentary democracy is the transfer of power to the people. This does not happen naturally; concentrated efforts need to be put towards it. According to Socrates, democracy is useless unless the society or the people at large do not understand their rights and the importance of ensuring them. In order to make this a reality there is a need to create social consciousness with core values of rationality, justice, fearless, and acceptance and appreciation of diversity. In the last 30 years, India has witnessed

an increase in violence which has become the new accepted normal. The society is living in an environment of hate and fear. In these times, the role of an active citizenry is extremely important which would provide a direction and momentum towards realising the true democratic principles. India with an increasingly growing young population requires a movement which moulds the youth as active citizens of present and future India who believe in and promote the values of justice, equity, solidarity and freedom. Centre for Promoting Democracy (CPD) is an organization dedicated towards achieving this goal through engagement with various sections of the society.

Vision:

CPD strives for the creation of a democratic humane society based on values of democracy, equity, affirmative discrimination, justice and secularism. It envisions to promote and strengthen everyday democracy as an integral value for daily living aimed towards building mutual respect and dignity for human beings and environment. To uphold universal human rights for all and to free the society from all forms of oppression and exploitation.

Mission:

CPD aims to engage with the citizenry (with special focus on oppressed sections), civil society groups and different tiers of the government to promote the vision of effective and engaged everyday democracy. Developing a process of advocacy for democratisation of institutions of polity to facilitate participatory policy making, enriching democracy through capacity building for various groups and disseminating knowledge about importance and interlinkages between the constitution and democratic functioning.

Strategy:

CPD strongly believes in the importance of an informed and active citizenry for enriching democracy. It is aimed towards working with people to develop their understanding and building their respect for democratic values through capacity building about democratic policies and processes. Through a continuous engagement with the people especially the youth, CPD aims to facilitate existing spaces for people's participation, increase transparency and accountability in governance and facilitate creation of new spaces through sustained dialogue with institutions of governance. Dedicated efforts will also be put to facilitate processes to overcome linguistic and technological barriers in participatory governance.

Interventions:

1. Awareness, Education and Trainings

Promotion of constitutional and universal human rights through awareness drives. Specialized training programs to build an understanding on interlinkages between constitution and democracy, facilitating knowledge dissemination around importance of participatory

processes in achieving the true value of democracy. Development of awareness material and dissemination of the same for creating active citizenry.

2. Research and policy analysis

Conduct research and policy analysis to formulate participatory democratic policies and facilitate democratization of existing institutional processes.

3. Advocacy and lobbying

To engage in advocacy for effective people centric and participatory policies, programs and processes.

4. Networks and alliances

To build networks and accountability forums to promote democratic governance.

5. Solidarity

To extend solidarity with all efforts and initiatives for democratic society.

Programs:

CPD is engaged in and plans to develop multitude of programs to take steps towards the realisation of its vision and mission. It realises that programs need to be designed keeping in context the need for both immediate and long-term interventions.

1. Our Samvidhan, Our democracy (SMART Citizenry)

A firm belief in developing an understanding about the constitution to strengthen democracy requires a multi-pronged approach.

- In the present age of internet and online platforms, CPD aims to reach out to the masses through an online video series on unravelling the true meaning of constitutional rights, human rights, citizenship and responsibilities, democratic governance, role of the citizenry and mechanisms to achieve in promoting effective everyday democracy. In order to reach out to a wider section of the population especially the young the online video series would be conducted in Hindi and Marathi. Collaborations would be sort with certain established online open access platforms for dissemination through their portals as well as through independent YouTube channel.
- In order to develop an understanding among the youth regarding democracy, constitutional rights, democratic governance, roles and responsibilities, a module would be developed in collaboration with experts. Municipal schools will be approached to initiate special sessions based on these modules for students of class 8 to 12th. The idea is to generate an understanding, awareness and a sense of responsibility among the adolescents and creating an active citizenry for the future. This program would aim at

creating a platform called Bal-Mumbaikar which will consist of representatives of various schools who engaged in the training through these specialized modules.

- Similar initiative like the one in schools will be undertaken for students of Junior Colleges and a concept of “Samvidhan katta” would be developed and implemented by the trained youth.

2. Democratising Urban Governance

The experience of the urban has been quite different from the rural in context to engagement, ownership and participation in the local governance. Development policies and social conditions are encouraging more migration to urban spaces. Urban democracies are in crises as they are not accepted as third tier of governance and thus lack delegation of independent functions, trained functionaries and access to sufficient funds.

- Our going work on the Development Plan of Mumbai in collaboration with various other organizations has provided CPD with a rich source of information regarding programs, policies, institutional challenges, spaces for interventions etc. Therefore, in order to build an understanding and strengthen our advocacy efforts, our programs would be extensively involved in conducting research to inform needs and scope for policy and program development and effective implementation with people’s participation.
- Advocate for transparency and accountable urban governance.
- Facilitate implementation of 74th Constitutional amendment with spirit of participatory governance through awareness building and training of various citizen groups, resident welfare organizations around the need, importance and scope of ward committees and Area Sabha.
- Advocate and facilitate participatory budget making and implementation

3. Urban policy forum

Facilitate a forum where people from various walks of life like students, academics, experts, activists, unions, movements and policy makers discuss policy – program formulation and implementation for making it more people centric and effective. Additionally, it would allow for exchange of ideas and ability to monitor and track various dimensions of urban governance.

4. Policy maker's course

Based on experiential understanding it has been observed that a large section of the elected representatives are unaware about the nuances of urban governance and lack specific trainings on various aspects of urban governance. This has resulted in short-sighted decision making. Training modules will be developed on Development Plans, Participatory budgeting, Area Sabha etc. especially keeping in focus the elected representatives.

5. Urban activist resource centres

Urban movements are fragmented and there is an absence for space where people can share concerns, build networks, extend solidarity, exchange ideas, access policies-regulations, co-create IEC, have online and off-line knowledge on dimensions related to local governance in local

languages. Therefore, in the long run CPD aims to create an online platform where resources-official/ government related policies, acts, program guidelines; books; articles; community generated resources in the form of slogans, posters, songs and; updates on various democratic initiatives being undertaken across the country would be shared. The main focus of this platform would be to make it user-friendly by providing it in multiple local languages.