



Understanding Democracy from the Roads of Old Delhi to Deshbandhu College

- Biswajit Sahoo (Editor in Cheif)

While we all might be having different opinions about the state of democracy in our country it is all futile without understanding it from everyone's perspective. All our notions of Democracy are some way or another biased because of our preoccupied ideas whether through books, newspapers, television, and social media. But in order to really understand the Idea of India and her Democratic values I went on a walk through the roads of Old Delhi or as we know it Delhi 6. My co-editor Sameer and I our team tried to ask people different questions and understand their thoughts and also discussed the same with the students of Deshbandhu College to see the difference.

The days of April in Delhi are really hot. Summer here is challenging as well as tiring at the same time. Make a note to carry water, sunscreen, and all other protections against the heat wave possible. So the journey in the search for ideas of Democracy began around 12 Noon. Kindly read through the following parts with an open heart and mind to understand what things we learned through our mantle in Old Delhi.

Democracy- A word for the privileged?

We all might think that Democracy is available to all of us irrespective of class, caste, creed, gender, sexuality, and religion. Although our constitutions provide us all with all democratic rights the question is how far everyone enjoys the right. Let's take the example of the NALSA judgment. The landmark judgment along with the recognition of Transgender people as the Third gender gave them the right to reservation in admission to educational institutions and jobs. Yet nine years have passed since then but still, neither Transpersons have been given horizontal reservations nor the required opportunities in education and jobs.

One thing that I realized while asking people questions regarding Democracy was that I took the wrong approach. Asking people directly about Democracy was very wrong of me. It comes from a background of privilege to think and talk about these words lie, democracy, government, equality, and freedom. We have been exposed to these ideas so frequently because we had the opportunity to go to good schools and colleges and even get an education. But people who were not as privileged as us, who depend on daily wages for their survival don't have the time to think or even imagine these words. But that doesn't mean they don't practice democracy. They vote, isn't that enough? I thought until free and fair elections are happening we have no problem. But in reality, these people have a lot to do with Democracy.

While talking with an old man who's a balloon seller said that one thing that he fears is which day the police will force him to vacate the place. His only hope and request to the government would be that he be allowed to do his business without any inconvenience.



A 42-year-old soap-bubble maker seller who on weekdays works at the nearby electronic market shared his life story. The wage he earns from the shop is not enough so he sells toys or soap bubble makers on the weekend. His aspirations and expectations are for his children. He wants that his children get free education and jobs to survive.

The idea of Sabka Saath and Sabka Vikas does not get fulfilled until everyone gets to benefit from the government policies. Meeting another 82-year-old person made me realize that. He sells old coins and exchanges torn-out notes. He expressed his anguish over Demonetization when he lost his livelihood. He said that corruption is still prevalent in the country because he can see it happening every day in the market. The emergence of the UPI payment system has made all our lives easier yet it has affected small businesses a lot. No doubt we should move ahead with the growing technology but we should not forget that there are other people who exist. Even expecting people from small businesses to take online payments is very problematic because it sometimes makes them look down on themselves because of not having the knowledge or access to technology.



Does silence speak?

It is indeed true that silence speaks when words can't. But sometimes too much silence sometimes raises questions. I failed to get any answers from many people even after changing my approach by asking questions about their daily life. Although I respect people's decision to not speak this brings up two questions. Either people are fearing to answer or they are uninterested in the same. People are uninterested. That's true, most people don't care much about politics but the situation used to be different. The level of protests and vocal people used to be on critical issues aren't the same. This can be linked to the continuous meddling of the state with free speech through draconian laws like UAPA and Sedition. Also, the rising polarization and sense of dislike among communities have created fear among people to express anything freely.

This silence really speaks a lot about the state of democracy. Democracy needs dialogue and we cannot forget that. Debate, discussion, and dissent are vital for any healthy democracy. While this spirit of Democracy is still visible in many spaces. Certain sections of the media are working really hard to protect and preserve the spirit of Democracy. The silence of people was also evidence of the frustration of people from the politics that goes on around the globe and the dissatisfaction with the system.

But not everyone is silent. When I reached for answers on democracy in my college to understand the contrast between the people speaking in Old Delhi and the students of our college. Students also have their own understanding of Democracy, but it's also saddening yet not so surprising that students who are studying and at the forefront of Politics yet they hesitate to speak about the same.

Between Hope & Tension: moving ahead

The whole journey from the roads of Chandni Chowk to Deshbandhu College itself was a learning experience. The Diversity of India is its real strength we should never forget it and must remind everyone every day even if they pretend to forget.

The fabric of Secularism just not guarantees equality based on religion but on caste, creed, gender, sexuality, and race. Textbooks can be changed, dynasties might be removed from books, and criminals can be acquitted of serious crimes but we should never stop questioning. This is the only constant that keeps our Democracy alive and sustaining.

Listening to people, their aspirations, and dreams give us hope to work toward strengthening this Democracy every day. Seeing people playing Ektara in the sunny afternoons of Delhi inspires us to live for that cause of India where Nehru said about the tryst with destiny. There are a lot many things that are happening around the globe. Every student who answered in the college has a word. Be it Equality, freedom, equality, fraternity, and many more. We did overcome many catastrophes, from partition to covid, India has had a long journey but all that we can do to sustain the India of our dream is remember every time We the people of India...

And finally, if there was to be an answer found for Is Democracy on the brink? The answer is not as clear or direct as you might think it to be. The answer depends on how you imagine India.

