



## Transcription

Democracy in Question? – Season 2, Episode 3

### What ails Indian democracy today?

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**SR:** Welcome to "Democracy in Question?" the podcast series that explores the challenges democracies are facing around the world. I'm Shalini Randeria, the Director of the Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy at the Graduate Institute in Geneva, and the Rector of the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna.

[00:00:30] I'm joined today by Yogendra Yadav, a well-known Indian political theorist who has written extensively on Indian elections, on democracy in India, and also on social movements. In fact, one could say that Yogendra established electoral studies in India at the Center for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi, but quit academia in 2016 to establish a political party, Swaraj India. He is the author of many important books on Indian politics, including *State of Democracy in South Asia*, *Electoral Politics in Indian States*, and, most recently, *Making Sense of Indian Democracy*, a collection of his essays. A warm welcome to you, Yogendra, and thanks so much for making time for our discussion in the midst of a hectic period of what is probably not only campaigning during the ongoing elections in several Indian states but also your tour of the country in the midst of widespread farmers protests all over India.

[00:01:30]

**YY:** Thanks for that very generous introduction, Shalini.

**SR:** So, you have argued very often that Indian democracy has been a spectacular success and has succeeded beyond anyone's expectations in

1947 when our leaders decided so boldly to establish universal franchise, despite widespread poverty, inequality, illiteracy in the country, in a society, which was multilingual, multi-religious, highly diverse, where actually according to all political science theory, democracy should not have succeeded. So let's take a step back and walk us through the successes of Indian democracy.

[00:02:00]

**YY:** It's an odd starting point. And I'm glad you've chosen this because, in today's context, it would be very awkward for anyone to begin to list the successes of Indian democracy. At a moment when democracy is, kind of, folding up, the easiest thing for anyone would be to turn once back to the so-called successes, to say that these successes were indeed no successes or to write a rather simplistic story of the decline and fall of Indian democracy, which was, sort of, written into the very unfolding of Indian democracy right from day one. That's not a standpoint that I take. I think we need to move away from two very simple narratives of Indian democracy. One narrative would say, "Well, Indian democracy was bound to fail. It was no democracy, indeed, and no wonder it has collapsed the way it has." The other narrative would say, "No, it's a spectacular, wonderful success. I don't know why it suddenly collapsed. Mr. Modi, the current prime minister, happens to be just a bad accident." I don't buy any of these two versions. And that's why it's very important to begin by noticing the successes. And my argument is that some of the failure is actually written into these successes.

Let's start with a thought experiment. If you were a political scientist in 1950 and if you knew everything about the world, but you did not know about this country called India, what would be your forecast? I bet if you were told that India is a country with the kind of diversity it had, it continues to have, if you were told that India is as unequal as it was, continues to be, if you were told that India was so uneducated, much less so today, your guess would be that democracy would not take off at all. And you would be right in 95 out of 100 such cases. India happens to be an exception. The one spectacular success of Indian democracy was in sheer mobilization. If you focus on electoral politics, to begin with, while participation in democratic elections tended to decline all over the world or remain just static, India is one of those few countries where electoral turnout has actually gone up over the years, where turnout actually expands as you go down social hierarchy.

[00:05:00] The rich vote much less than the poor. The disadvantaged castes, the ex-untouchables vote much more than those at the upper end of social hierarchy, the Brahmins. Rural areas vote much more than urban metropolitan areas. And of late, women vote more than men. That's extraordinary. It is also a success in a second and very deep sense. Nowhere else in the world did democracy accommodate as many deep diversities as it did in India. India packs as much social, cultural, linguistic diversity as the whole of Europe. Now, no one would have said that such a deeply diverse country can remain a nation state. In that sense, I would say India is a case of a spectacular success of the democratic experiment. And in that sense, I say India should be credited

with democratizing the idea of democracy. Democracy existed before India, and the idea of modern democracy clearly comes in from the West. But before Universal Adult Franchise was introduced and successfully so in India, no one would believe that democracy could be extended to the rest of the world. It was, after all, a small and lovely experiment in Europe, where democracy was introduced in tiny doses over a couple of centuries, that you could open floodgates of democracy in a deeply unequal, uneducated country *and* to have the experiment succeed was really beyond anyone's imagination. And in that sense, India made it possible for the entire world to think that democracy could actually be universalized. That's something we must recall, even when we look at the rather sad and sorry state of the democratic experiment in India today.

[00:07:00]

**SR:** The Indian experience of democracy poses, therefore a fundamental challenge, if you like, to Western theorizations of democratic consolidation and democratic decline because one of the puzzles of Indian democracy is exactly as you point out the consistently high voter turnout of the poor, and the marginalized, who have benefited, arguably the least from the countries also remarkable economic growth in the last years. So that in the light of the Indian experience, would one need to rethink the relationship between prosperity and democracy, between welfare state and democracy?

**YY:** Indeed, puzzle like beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder. The reason why it looks to us to be a puzzle is because we have a somewhat

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lazy expectation. The expectation is that democracy works for the majority. And in a country where the majority is poor, democracy will work for the poor. Sounds reasonable.

[00:08:00] What we don't see is a very long chain of assumptions, which is built into this. The assumption is that people know what their needs are, not just their desires. Step two is that they can convert those needs into demands. They can articulate that. The first step would require a certain level of self-consciousness. The second step would require some degree of political organization. Step three is that those demands are then articulated at a macro level. So I, as a poor, feel that I'm not getting enough, someone else in the village next door also feels the same way. Someone has to bring all that together. That requires a functioning, somewhat independent media. The fourth step is for that to be converted into a political manifesto, that then, once that is articulated on a political platform, then it comes into the electoral domain. That's step five. And in the electoral domain, it must acquire a certain salience. It must trump other things.

[00:09:30] Now, the reason I go through this entire chain is to say that there is a problem at each step. Unfortunately, we begin our story at step five of this chain. We assume that the first four steps have taken place, that popular consciousness has developed to a certain level, that there are social and political organizations that are in existence, that there is a media which is doing its job, and that there are competing political parties ready to pick these issues. Mostly, these things don't happen. And I would actually argue that the presence of all these four things

simultaneously is more of an exception than the rule. As a result, democracy, the infamous tyranny of majority, fails to work for the majority. And that's indeed the real paradox, that we expect democracy to work for the majority. And in the Indian case, the disconnect between welfare state and electoral democracy is but one instance of that.

[00:10:30]

**SR:** Let me pick up a second point, which you made a little earlier because I think that is also a very fundamental difference between the Western experience of democracy with nation-states and what you have called the state-nation in the Indian case; that the Federal structure of the highly diverse Indian polity with strong linguistic and regional identities used to be seen in the 60s and 70s, actually as a redeeming feature of Indian democracy and the state-nation approach as opposed to the Western nation-state approach, has prevented balkanization as many political scientists argued. What do you think has changed about the relationship between India's democratic politics and regional identities, which used to be so strong as against this unifying Hindu identity of a majority, which seems to have become hegemonic?

[00:11:30]

**YY:** This refers to an argument that some of us had made about a decade ago in that book called *Crafting State-Nations*. The book argued that the idea of a homogenizing nation-state, which seeks to suppress all diversities, doesn't work in most parts of the world, that actually this European way of dealing with diversities and the expectation that unity

resides in uniformity is a model that belongs to the past. We argued that the real problem in the European approach was that it sought to bring together the cultural boundaries with political boundaries. Wherever you have different languages, ethnicities, you need a different political unit. That approach which Europe adopted is an approach which has actually led to enormous bloodshed in the 20th century. We argue this different approach that we call state-nation. The state-nation approach says, "Deep cultural differences are very much possible and can be accommodated within political boundaries of a state." And we took India as one of the prime examples. We said that that extraordinary success of India in dealing with so many cross-cutting diversities of language, of religion, of caste, that was possible because the makers of Indian nation embraced these diversities from the front door. India's national anthem begins by saying, "pañjāb sindhu gujarāt marāṭhā drābīra utkal baṅga." These are names of different states and regions of India. Rather than demand that these different linguistic, regional ethnic identities dissolve themselves, Indian states' policies, at least officially, were about accepting all these linguistic differences, giving legitimate space to the regional political parties. Now the real question is, what has happened to that? Because what we witnessed today is centralization. What we witness is India now going back to the nation-state approach.

[00:13:30] So, a country that taught the world how not to deal with diversities and how to have a more confident way of embracing diversities is now going back to a failed European model. Why has that become possible? I have half an answer. It is precisely because those regional

political formations were accepted. It meant that the assertion of regional identity did not require a political struggle. And that I think is where the problem lies, which is that the regional aspirations, the diversities were accommodated too soon, too easily. So, as a result, we have regional political parties, which are not regionalist anymore. They have too easily given into a politics which looks after their own interest without looking at the broader questions of what you call federalism. I'll just give you one example.

[00:14:50] Last year, 2020, suddenly, the government decided that the state of Jammu Kashmir, which has seen many disputes, which continues to be a bone of contention between India and Pakistan, a state that enjoyed a very special constitutional protection, was provided a special autonomy, indeed, was the only state which had a constitution of its own, a flag of its own, suddenly overnight, the present government decided and rushed through an amendment in the constitution, a rather dubious amendment I should mention, which meant that the state would cease to exist overnight. Now, what is so tragic about what happened there is that many of these regional political parties had a veto power in the upper house of Indian Parliament, that is to say, if all the regional parties had come together to say, "Okay. It's Jammu and Kashmir today. It can be me tomorrow. So, let me defend federalism. Let me protect this state of the union from being just folded up overnight." But sadly, that did not happen. Many of these regional political parties that are in alliance with the ruling BJP, they chose to close their eyes. So, in some ways, it is the rather easy success of regional politics and rather easy

accommodation without deep contestation that has led to weakening or rather absence of federal sentiment in India, which has allowed the current ruling party, which is very much a centralizing force, which is very much a force that believes in certain European notions of unity and uniformity, for that force to be able to concentrate powers the way it has.

[00:16:30]

**SR:** Many on the Indian left, but not only on the Indian left, in the U.S., or also in Europe are very quick to use terms like fascist or authoritarian for the illiberal turn or, in fact, one should often say, also anti-liberal turn, that politics and democratic politics has taken, not only in India but in many parts of Europe. You have used a very interesting formulation in your recent set of essays. You call it *democracy capture*. When you describe the Indian political situation, you have a very intriguing statement, which says, "Democracy is both the object of this capture, and it is the subject of this capture." Could you explain the term and how that helps analyze the Indian situation specifically?

[00:17:30]

**YY:** There are two easy ways to refer to what's happening in India today. You could call it the inevitable decline and collapse of democracy in a poor Third World country. You could, on the other hand, say just bad, unfortunate accident. Now, I'm saying neither. For me, it is important to bring in agency here. There is someone who captures democracy at one critical moment, that capture is neither accidental nor inevitable. So the word *democracy capture*, in one sense, distinguishes from these two easy

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readings, inevitability and mere accident. On the other hand, the idea of democracy capture also registers the fact that it is not merely authoritarian capture of democracy, that actually, seemingly democratic procedures have been used to subvert the substance of democracy. It is not an army dictator. It is legitimately elected government through seemingly free and fair elections, which has come to now subvert democracy. Making sense of Indian democracy requires us to rewrite democratic theory. Democratic theory has worked for far too long with some very simplistic assumptions, you know, the obsession about getting it correct definition of democracy and then posing a binary: Are you a democracy? Are you not a democracy? Second, it involves a universal normative standard. A good democracy is something that has A, B, C. Followed by almost a prescriptive checklist of this is how you operationalize democracy. You need a legislature over the following features. You need media, which has the following features and so on and so forth. And finally, there is a narrative of a fixed route that democracy must take. So, there is this theory about transition to democracy, consolidation of democracy, and culmination in a finished product democracy. My sense, and I think if you look at Indian democracy closely, and I daresay if you looked at democracy in most parts of the world, you would notice that this narrative simply does not hold.

[00:20:00] We need not relive the history of Europe and North America. Indeed, what is presented to us as the history of democracy in Europe and North America is no more than autobiography of these countries.

And autobiographies, as we know, are notoriously selective in presenting a few things and in concealing a lot more. Therefore, I think we need not think of our aspirations in terms of Europe and North American examples. At the same time, we must not look at pathologies of our democracy, in terms of examples, parallels drawn from European history. I do think what we are witnessing today in India is deeply undemocratic. What we are witnessing is a nightmare of our freedom fighters. But just as every serious disease is not cancer, similarly, every deep disfiguration of democracy is not fascism. I think there's this somewhat lazy tendency to fall back upon European parallels to understand our own history. It's not a very helpful, intellectual enterprise. We need to register our own dreams in our own language, and we need to recognize our own nightmares in our own language, therefore, simply calling it fascist, which draws upon a very peculiar European experience. It does not quite tell me what's happening. Similarly, words like populism do not quite capture what Mr. Modi is doing in India today. Democracy is a deeply contingent journey, a journey that has outcomes, which are not predetermined, and a journey which has goals, which are culturally determined.

[00:22:00] The specificity of the Indian experience right now is that we are witnessing two things. One is we have electoral authoritarianism. Election is almost the only episode that we have, which can be described as democratic. And in between two elections, the country is becoming, for all practical purposes, an authoritarian country. And this is accompanied by a de facto abandonment of the secular dream. Officially,

India will not become a Hindu country, or that's what I think even now. But for all practical purposes, all minorities are being reduced to the level of a secondary institution. Words like fascism or populism don't quite capture it. I would not give in to these ready-made labels, which prevent me from understanding the specificity of what I'm facing today.

**SR:** If I understand you rightly, the argument you are making is that it's not enough to have a defense of Western liberal values and look for the constituencies which will defend it because Indian democracy must be built on a bedrock of our own deeper civilizational ideas and that there is a cultural battle ahead. The cultural battle ahead of us today in India must defend the idea of India as codified in the Constitution. Is it the language of the Constitution then which could be part of the language in which a defense of the Republic could be possible?

[00:23:30]

**YY:** Increasingly, I've come to think that what we are witnessing is not merely the disfiguring of Indian democracy. What we are witnessing is a dismantling of the Republic. Unfortunately, in 20<sup>th</sup> century political science, we have reduced Republic simply to a technical description of a regime that does not have a monarch. I think we need to dig deeper. We need to step back from merely the language of democracy to a deeper language of the Republic. I'm not merely speaking about constitutional patriotism because, to me, Constitution is not critical merely because it is the Constitution. To me, the Indian Constitution is critical because it happens to codify the consensus arrived at by the Indian National

Movement. And the Indian National Movement was important. The anti-colonial struggle for India's freedom was important, not merely because it brought freedom to our country, not merely because it paved the way for Constituent Assembly, but because this movement reconciled and synthesized modern India's encounter with its own traditions. So there is a deep intellectual significance, deep theoretical significance of India's freedom struggle and the ideas that it produced. To my mind, that is the foundation on which the democratic experiment in India is founded. It is the richness of that intellectual and political tradition, which allowed Indian democracy to be such a shining exception. It is that tradition which allowed democracy to flourish in conditions where it normally should not have flourished. And unfortunately, it is the sudden decline of that tradition, which has meant that this very rich repository of ideas has dried up. And our Republic suddenly finds itself in a situation where day-to-day political judgment is deeply compromised and where a very simple-minded aggressive nationalist majoritarian view suddenly takes over.

[00:26:00] Now, the point that I'm making is this, that Indian National Movement, India's anti-colonial movement for freedom, shaped a new idea of India, which draws upon the multiple traditions, cultures, languages that India had, but forges it in a very modern context. The modern Indian political thinkers, people like Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Ambedkar, were trying to forge a very indigenous modernity, a very Indian modernity. That is what is so unique about India. That is what has allowed democracy to flourish. And that needs to be preserved. That

needs to be recalled. That needs to be nourished. Unfortunately, in the last, almost two generations, Indians have simply not nourished it anymore.

[00:27:00] My generation did not struggle for freedom. We got it. And we started on a very complacent assumption that this nation is here to stay, and therefore, the nourishing of that idea, that did not take place. And suddenly, that idea of India has shrunk. And in place of that, we find an antithesis represented by the current regime. They stand for a very one-dimensional view of our republic that seeks to subvert the idea of democracy on which it is founded, that seeks to subvert the respect for diversity. And that seeks to subvert the idea of development for the last person, which at least as an ideal was held up in our republic. So, to my mind, the antidote to what is happening today is not merely to say, "Oh, my God, this is not a liberal country anymore. Oh, my God, the Constitution is being defiled." Of course, all that is happening. But the antidote to that is to recall that idea of India, which is a deep, culturally rich, self-confident, civilizational value that we have inherited.

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**SR:** How might it be possible to reclaim this legacy, the legacy of the freedom struggle led by Gandhi, the legacy of the Indian National Movement? Because some may argue against you that nationalism is not the solution. It's really part of the problem.

**YY:** The problem of looking at India through the prism of European history is best exemplified in this question. In Europe, nationalism is

almost a curse word. It's a code word. You are simply saying this party is parochial. They are anti-migrant. They are possibly racist, and so on. In the European political vocabulary, especially after the Nazi experience, nationalism stands for narrow parochial forces. Nationalism actually pits you against your neighbor. Nationalism is a force in European history, that causes enormous bloodshed, destruction, division, warfare, and so on. Now, that cannot and must not be equated to what is called nationalism in India. I almost wish we had two different words for it. And I daresay Indian freedom struggled, what is called nationalism in India, it is not a nationalism of the European variety because Indian nationalism, I would say, is predominantly force that releases positive energy. Indian nationalism does not pit me against my neighbor. In fact, the Indian Nationalist Movement enabled us to connect with South America, with Africa...

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**SR:** Southeast Asia.

**YY:** ...Bandung. I mean, this is... the Indian National Movement actually connects India to the rest of the world.

**SR:** Yes, because it's an anti-colonial nationalism, right?

**YY:** Mind you, it was anti-colonial but never racist. There's no anti-white content to Indian National Movement. So, what I'm saying is that nationalism in the context of India is a positive force that connects us to

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the rest of the world, especially in the rest of the colonized world. It's a force that builds unity across cultures, across languages, across regions, and which enables Indians to overcome the deep divisions of caste and religion. So it's a very, very positive force. And I think that after independence, those who inherited the legacy of the modern Indian state failed to build on this nationalist capital, as it were. And we started feeling as awkward about our nationalism as if it is a European nationalism. And as a result, modern educated English educated Indians, who came to occupy positions of power, started shunning our nationalism, being awkward, being silent about it. This, of course, created room, space for a very aggressive, narrow European kind of nationalism in India. And this very European understanding of nationalism, which never became popular during the freedom struggle, which was decisively defeated by the Indian freedom struggle, that came to dominate India, sadly, and ironically, almost 50 years after independence. And I do blame the modern Indian liberal, educated elite for that. If in India, you say, "Well, I'm learning Sanskrit, or I'm learning Arabic," well, you would be seen with a very awkward lens. Most modern Indians would feel awkward about using their own language, languages like Tamil, languages like Kannada, classic Odia. These are very old, deep, and rich languages. This linguistic apartheid of putting English above all and making every Indian feel awkward about their own language and culture, making them almost illiterate about their own language and cultures. It has created a generation of Indians who are politically powerful, prosperous, who are beginning to travel around the world, but who are culturally vacuous, who have no understanding of their own

culture, their own country, their own tradition, their own language. And that is why this kind of a subject is so susceptible to BJP's propaganda because BJP promises to deliver to them cultural self-confidence by handing them over a label of Hinduism.

[00:33:00]

**SR:** You have made a very controversial statement, which I'm going to read to you and ask you to comment on when you have said, and I quote you, "*Secularism was defeated because the secular elite talked down to its critics in English. Secularism was defeated because it disavowed our languages because it failed to connect with the language of traditions because it refused to learn or speak the language of our religions. Specifically, secularism was defeated because it chose to mock Hinduism, instead of developing a new interpretation of Hinduism suitable for our times.*" And what would a future reincarnation of secularism look like? And how would it, for example, square individual rights of women, or Dalits, or Muslim when they come into conflict with other group rights, and especially of those who are claiming group rights in the name of the Hindu majority?

**YY:** What I said, the point that you've quoted, came in the context of a judgment by the Supreme Court of India, which almost legitimized one of the worst acts of religious aggression, a majoritarian religious aggression, namely the demolition of Babri Mosque. So it was a rather low point for Indian secularism. And I said, you know, "Stop blaming the BJP. Stop blaming those who are out to destroy secularism," not because they are

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not to be blamed, but if we wish to move forward, we must begin by doing some introspection. Secularism cannot in a country like India, with deep religious divisions, and deep religious affiliations, secularism has a life if an overwhelming majority of Indians continue to believe that it should have a life. And sadly, an overwhelming majority of Indians, including modern educated Indians, now believe that secularism is a bit of a burden, a bit of an over concession to minorities, and that secularism is a product of deracinated elite. And I have argued that our elite is indeed deracinated. We have produced an elite, which has no knowledge of our religious traditions and, therefore, is susceptible to any low-grade propaganda of what can be passed off in the name of Hinduism. And that's why I said, "What we need is an honest, open-ended engagement with religious traditions." This has disturbed many of my friends. And I understand because the moment you say engagement with religious traditions, it seems to indicate that you would accept whatever is passed on in the name of religion, all the obscurantism that comes sometimes in the name of religion, all the inequalities that are defended in the name of religion, all the oppression which is sanctified by religion. I simply do not agree with this assessment.

[00:36:30] I believe that all religions of this world carry some deep humanist values, and they bring a lot of nonsense that is accumulated over the centuries with that religious establishment. And I think this nonengagement with Hinduism has not led with the secularization. Indeed, it has produced culturally impoverished vacuous Hindus who are susceptible to any propaganda in the name of Hinduism. The antidote to

that is not turning our back to religion. The only way is to take a deep dive into religions and to be able to say, "What the BJP is saying is not Hinduism," and do something similar to all religions. To my mind, that is the only way of saving secularism.

[00:37:15]

**SR:** So, we've had a wide-ranging conversation on very fundamental issues, but I don't want to stop before I ask you something about your recent career, not only as somebody who has formed a political party, Swaraj India, but also because we are having this conversation, let's not forget, in what is now the fifth month of the massive protests by farmers throughout India against the new agricultural laws, farmers who are demanding that these three laws be repealed. They're calling instead for a legally guaranteed minimum support price for agricultural products. You've been traveling throughout the country, speaking to a lot of the farmers and their leaders. For a lot of people, this farmer's protest has come out of the blue. You have been saying it is a result of many years of sustained mobilization, and it's a lot of organizations coming together. And if we could get some idea from you of your view of the protests, your view of the significance of those protests for the future of Indian democracy.

[00:38:15]

**YY:** I've been arguing for some time that we need to shift our attention away from electoral politics to primarily a politics of movements. And in those movements, the two movements that we should look towards are A,

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the question of farmers' movement, and second, that of unemployment protest of the youth. What has happened in the last five months in India, it's not something that happened suddenly on its own. A lot of work went into the making of what looks like a sudden arrival of the farmers' movement. In 2017, there was an incident of police firing in the state of Madhya Pradesh. That led us to the formation of an All India coalition, All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee, a coordination committee for all farmers' struggles of the country. On that platform, we brought together more than 200 organizations. And around that nucleus, farmers protests have emerged, rallies of hundreds of thousands of farmers, more than 100,000 farmers was organized in 2018. So, it's a climax of a lot of work that has taken place over the last four or five years. And underlying that is a deep structural crisis of Indian agriculture. The problem is not merely that the government introduced three laws, which the farmers are opposing, but this happened to be the last straw on the back of the camel. The real problem is that Indian agriculture faces a triple crisis. There is an economic crisis. There is an ecological crisis, and there is an existential crisis. All these three have come together to constitute the present moment in Indian agriculture. And therefore, when we look at the future of agriculture, we should not merely look at whether these three laws would be unrolled. That's not the be-all and end all of farmers politics. The real farmers' politics, the long-term challenge is to create a movement that would provide an alternative way of thinking about the agrarian, and indeed rural India.

[00:40:30] The current dominant imagination is that India will have to relive the history of Europe when it comes to agriculture, which is to say, sooner than later, farmers have to disappear. They have to cease to exist. Only 5% to 7% will do agriculture. The rest will be absorbed somewhere else.

And therefore, we continue to think of farmers and the rural as a dustbin of history. We continue to look through them as if they don't exist. That is the real heart of the problem. We need a new imagination. We need to put the well-being of the farmers and prosperous, thriving villages as the cornerstone of a new architecture of India. We need to believe that villages are not here merely as dustbins of history. They are lampposts of a future of India. Now, that's a leap of faith. That requires a new cultural imagination, and that requires a new economics altogether. So, what we are looking at is not merely a movement for some monetary gains of the farmers. What is at stake is indeed thinking about the future of India in a different frame. And to my mind, that indeed is the point of doing politics, to refer to my transition from academia to political practice. To paraphrase the old man, "Democratic theory has interpreted political systems. The point, however, is to change it."

[00:42:00]

**SR:** Wonderful. Thank you so much.

Democracy in India was not bound to fail but it has not been a spectacular success that suddenly collapsed under assault from right-wing, religious forces either. Democracy unified a highly diverse, unequal

society and yet democracy has not significantly improved the lives of the vast majority of people in the country. The Indian case questions therefore some very basic assumptions of western understandings of democracy and western theories of democracy. The current capture of democracy by the ruling party points to the fact that democracy is both the object of this capture but also the means through which democratic institutions have been instrumentalized and subverted to illiberal ends. A defense of democracy in India must be built on the bedrock of Indian civilizational ideas as well as the Indian constitution and cannot be built merely on western ideas of liberalism and secularism.

Thank you for listening to another episode of Democracy in Question.