

The Evolution from Monarchy to Republicanism in India: Its Features and Functions

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Abstract

Monarchy is a form of government in which a person, the monarch, is head of State for life or until abdication. Monarchs can carry various titles such as emperor, empress, king, and queen. Monarchies can form federations, personal unions and realms with vassals through personal association with the monarch, which is a common reason for monarchs carrying several titles. The political legitimacy and authority of the monarch may vary from restricted and largely symbolic (constitutional monarchy), to fully autocratic (absolute monarchy), and can span across executive, legislative, and judicial domains. The succession of monarchs in many cases has been hereditary, often building dynastic periods. Monarchies were the most common form of government until the 20th century, by which time republics had replaced many monarchies. With the rise of republicanism, a diverse division between republicanism developed in the 19th century politics, such as anti-monarchist radicalism and conservative or even reactionary monarchism. In the following 20th century many countries abolished the monarchy and became republics, especially in the wake of World War I and World War II.

Key Words

Monarchy, Democracy, Absolute, Constitutional, Kingdom, Republic, Travancore, Malaysia, England, India, Pakistan, Roman Empire etc.

Introduction

Monarchy is a form of government led by an individual who holds the position for life, having inherited the position and who passes it on to a close relative, usually a son or a daughter. Monarchies are of

two kinds, Absolute and Constitutional, which exist even in the modern world. The ancient Indian monarchy was a king who ruled over a territory as the protector of the territory, a capacity that involved both secular and religious powers. It was the strengthening of monarchic power by weakening feudal nobles and by allying themselves with the emerging commercial classes that led to the growth of absolute monarchies and nation-states in Europe.

Definition of Monarchy

Monarchy is a form of government with a monarch at its head. A monarch can be a king, a queen, an emperor, an empress, or any other different type of monarch throughout history. A monarchy is a form of government with a monarch at its head. A monarch is a ruler who governs for life or until they abdicate. The United Kingdom is an example of a monarchy, where the king holds ceremonial powers. Saudi Arabia is another example, but its king has absolute power. Vatican is known as the smallest kingdom in the worlds.

Monarchies in the present world are:

- Brunei, which is ruled by a Sultan.
- Eswatini, which is ruled by a king.
- Oman, which is ruled by a Sultan.
- Saudi Arabia, which is ruled by a king.
- The United Arab Emirates
- The Vatican City, which is ruled by the Pope.

Monarchies used to be much more common in the past. In recent centuries, increased support for democracy has eliminated a large number of monarchies. However, some countries continue to be ruled by dictators: strongmen who use force to keep themselves in power for life. Dictators are usually not considered monarchs, but there are plenty of similarities between the two.

Constitutional Monarchy

A constitutional monarchy, parliamentary monarchy or democratic monarchy is a form of monarchy in which the monarch exercises authority in accordance with a written or unwritten constitution, whereas a limited monarchy is one in which the royalty has only ceremonial powers.

Constitutional monarchy differs from absolute monarchy (in which a monarch holds absolute power) in that constitutional monarchs are bound to exercise their powers and authorities within the limits prescribed within an established legal framework. It is a form of government established under a constitutional system which acknowledges hereditary or elected Monarch as Head of State. Though the king or queen is regarded as the government's symbolic head, it is the Prime Minister who actually governs the country. The best example for this is King Charles III of England.

Evolution of Absolute Monarchy

Monarchical rule means that a single individual, typically referred to as the king or queen, controls all aspects of the government. According to Louis XIV of France, the “Sun King”, was quoted as saying, “I am the state”, perhaps the most eloquent and self-declared statement of the power of an absolute monarch. With an absolute monarchy, the ruler has absolute authority to govern the country without being held accountable to any laws or authorities. The prevalent system of government in ancient India was probably absolute monarchy. The ancient Indian system was a monarchical one, as it was administered by kings. Ancient India had a centralised government that controlled its citizens. Accordingly, the king would become an all-powerful Monarch, with a large number of officials who constituted the court, including the chief Queen who aided in decisionmaking. Absolute Monarchy in India is believed to have been initiated with the arrival of the Mauryans.

Absolute monarchy was instituted in India during the early centuries of the Christian Era. It demanded the word of the King as the Law of the Land, as he was the supreme authority. The Mauryan Empire was widespread throughout the Indian Subcontinent during the period of the Mauryan Dynasty. As a result of the rule of the Mauryas, the Guptas and the Mughals, several small and large kingdoms were created and established all over the country, according to hereditary rule. A loyal minister appointed by the hereditary king or sub-king assisted the kings in their rule and ensured their continuation in office. The kings were very much dependent on the ministers in day-to-day matters; these ministers exercised great authority.

India used to have a monarchy based on the principle of King-in-Ministry during the medieval period. The ministries played an integral role in the functioning of the administrative apparatus. It continued to be an absolute rule in the Mughal era, and the emperor was the first to administer it. To ensure a proper functioning of the government, the king used to convene private meetings with his Council of Ministers. Thus the monarch, who is the king, has absolute power to lead his country or state at his will and to enforce certain laws upon the citizens.

Historically, absolute monarchies were characterised by their ability to consolidate all political power under one central leader in order to enhance a nation’s power. A monarchy with absolute power allowed kings and queens to lead their nations in a disorganised way rather than spread power among many.

Indian Kingdom of Travancore

The Travancore royal family was the ruling house of the Kingdom of Travancore. They gave up their ruling rights in 1949 when Travancore merged with India and their political pension privileges were abolished in 1971. The family is descended from the Ay/Venad family and the Chera dynasty. The history of the Travancore royal family is always fascinating to Southern Indians a major section still has the love and faith towards the descendants despite the change of monarchy and the establishment of democracy.¹

The kingdom of Travancore was an Indian kingdom from 1729 until 1949. It was ruled by the Travancore royal family from Padmanabhapuram, and later from Thiruvananthapuram. The reign of Marthanda Varma marked a new epoch in the history of Venad, a part of the erstwhile Chera Empire. The state saw the end of feudalism and medievalism, and the dawn of modernism during this time. The empire created by him came to be called Travancore, since he was a member of the Trippappur Swarupam. He is hailed as the maker of modern Travancore.

The last ruling king of Travancore was Sree Chithira Tirunal Balarama Varma II who reigned from 1931 to 1949. When the British withdrew from India in 1947, it was declared that Travancore would remain an independent country, instead of joining the Indian Union, based on the American model. Following the revolts at various places in the country and after several rounds of discussions and negotiations, the Maharaja agreed that the kingdom would be acceded to the Indian Union in 1949. The king of Travancore, Chitra Thirunal Bala Rama Varma, became the Rajpramukh of the Travancore-Cochin Union from 1 July 1949 until 31 October 1956. When the State of Kerala was formed on 1 November 1956, Thiruvananthapuram became its capital. According to the 26th Amendment of the Constitution of India, Article 363 was repealed whereby the rights and privileges of the rulers of the Indian States were taken away; still the name and title of the rulers remained as such and unaffected in so far as names and titles were not contemplated as rights or privileges under the repealed Articles 291 and 362 of the Constitution. Since then, the Maharaja of Travancore remains as a titular position.

Transformation from Kingdom to Republic

Some monarchies are not hereditary. In an elective monarchy, monarchs are elected or appointed by some body (an electoral college) for life or a defined period. Four elective monarchies exist today: Cambodia, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates are 20th century creations, while one (the papacy) is ancient.²

A self-proclaimed monarchy is established when a person claims the monarchy without any historical ties to a previous dynasty. A self-proclaimed monarchy is a monarchy that is proclaimed into existence, often by a single individual, rather than occurring as part of a long standing tradition. It is thus initially the opposite of most hereditary monarchies. If a self-proclaimed monarchy is successful, it will evolve into a hereditary one.³

There are examples of republican leaders who have proclaimed themselves monarchs: Napoleon I of France declared himself Emperor of the French and ruled the First French Empire after having held the title of First Consul of the French Republic for five years from his seizing power in the coup of 18 Brumaire. President Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Republic declared himself Emperor of the Central

African Empire in 1976. Yuan Shikai, the first formal President of the Republic of China, crowned himself Emperor of the short-lived "Empire of China" a few years after the Republic of China was founded.⁴

The Pope is the absolute monarch of the Vatican City State, a separate entity from the Holy See, by virtue of his position as head of the Roman Catholic Church and Bishop of Rome. He is an elected rather than a hereditary ruler; he does not have to be a citizen of the territory prior to his election by the Cardinals.⁵ The Order of Malta describes itself as a "sovereign subject" based on its unique history and unusual present circumstances, but its exact status in international law is a subject of debate.

Norms in Absolute Monarchy

In an absolute monarchy, people do not have natural rights, and their only privileges are those granted by the monarch; Neither the government nor the country's course can be influenced by the people; Practising or abstaining from any religion that is not authorised by the king constitutes a serious crime, as the subjects are expected to practice the same faith as that of the king. Treason is considered a serious crime in the kingdom, and the perpetrator of such a crime undergoes severe punishment like torture or death. Normally, all laws are issued by the rulers, who serve only their own interests

Monarchy is the only legitimate form of government, as far as the Hindu-Buddhist traditions and the Perso-Islamic traditions of South Asia are concerned, Following the Persian traditions, the Mughals argued that "royalty is a light emanating from God, and a ray from the Sun called 'the divine light'. It is a special grace that can be bestowed on a good ruler which spreads prosperity and hope throughout the land; at the same time, it can be withdrawn from an unjust ruler.

The ancient Indian monarchy was a king who ruled over a territory as the protector of the territory, a capacity that involved both secular and religious powers. The Hindu-Buddhist traditions of India also come down strongly on the side of monarchy, much of which is inspired by the story of Rama in the Ramayana, which portrays him and his reign as the ideal form of polity. The reverence shown to the Thai and Bhutanese monarchies as well as the Hindu right's dream of a new Rama Rajya (reign of Rama) are all inspired by these ideals. The Hindu epic, the Mahabharata, also explains the origin and theory of kingship.⁶

Effects of Absolute Monarchy

Invested with the power of absolute monarchy, absolute monarchies attempted to consolidate their power inside their limits of the kingdom. A large royal court would be set up. The royal household included all those who looked after the monarch and the royal family regularly. Monarchs would do this to seem powerful and with a view to be able to control their nobility. Additionally, the government created large bureaucracies for the purpose of controlling the economy.

Religious belief was also closely controlled by absolute monarchies. In order to maintain power, monarchs needed to control what people heard. Absolute monarchies were greatly impacted by the Enlightenment and its ideas of liberty.

Absolute monarchies have no constitutions or bodies of law overarching the decrees of the monarch. Hence, the Monarch, who is the Maharaja, has the authority to rule his land or state freely while maintaining some laws. In India, therefore, the Absolute Monarch had absolute power over the people, the land, and even the aristocracy and the clergy. It has often been found that absolute monarchs are often restricted in their power by one or more of these groups. The best example for this was the Kingdom of Venad where the king was controlled by the Pillamar and the Yogakkar in former Kerala. Moreover, some monarchies had powerless or symbolic parliaments and other governmental units that could be changed or dissolved by the monarch as they deemed fit. After the arrival of the British, India's entire concept of absolute monarchy came through a change, and presently it is governed by the Constitution. With its republican nature, India has become the world's largest democracy.

Development of centralised Nation-States

India became a Republic On January 26, 1950, commemorating the adoption of its Constitution in 1950. This constitution, still in force, established a parliamentary model with a figurehead president. Republic Day is always a major celebration in India, because it commemorates the end of India's status as a dominion under the rule of the British monarch. Canada and Australia are Commonwealth realms, still ruled by the same person who serves as the monarch of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland today. Same was the case in India between 1947 and 1950, when in 1950 it was declared a Republic, whereas the neighboring Pakistan became a republic only in 1956.

India and Pakistan both abolished their monarchies under the British crown and became republics within the Commonwealth of Nations as a result of the promulgation of their respective constitutions in 1950 and 1956, respectively. As a result of these events, the princes of both countries lost their sovereign rights.

At the time of independence, there were 565 princely states in India, some of whom had high rank and ruled extensive lands, while some ruled just a few villages. India could have chosen a constitutional monarch from an illustrious family, most probably from the lineage of the Mughals or the Marathas, the last two major Indian dynasties that spanned most of the subcontinent and were viewed as legitimate by princely families and the people alike. Alternatively, India could have set up a system similar to the one that was later set up by two other former British colonies with native princes, namely, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates. Malaysia contains nine hereditary states, the rulers of which elect the king, Yang di-Pertuan Agong of Malaysia, from among themselves for a five-year term. The President of the United Arab Emirates is elected from among one of the seven hereditary Emirs of the constituent Emirates.

There is no doubt that democracy is uniquely suited to India relative to other non-western societies. Its people are argumentative and it has many loci of power whose leaders can use the democratic system to keep on rotating in and out of office, as in the game of Musical Chair. Ancient India had oligarchic republics; its monarchies were never absolute in the Chinese or Russian sense. Indian rulers had to uphold *Dharma* (righteousness), as otherwise they could be legitimately removed. Indian villages are known to have governed themselves through local councils. In spite of such a system of local governance in vogue, it was always a monarchical form of government that was, in a sense, part of the sacred order of things that also enabled representative councils at the village level made up of representatives of all castes.

Functions of Monarchies

A monarchy consists of distinct but interdependent institutions. It is a government and a state administration on the one hand, and a court and a variety of ceremonies on the other, which provide for the social life of the members of the dynasty, their friends, and the associated elite. Monarchy thus entails not only a political-administrative organisation but also a “court society”, a term coined by the 20th century German-born sociologist Norbert Elias to designate various groups of nobility, like the British nobility, that are linked to the monarchical dynasty or “royal house”, through a web of personal bonds. All such bonds are evident in symbolic and ceremonial proprieties.

During a given society's history there are certain changes and processes that create conditions conducive to the rise of monarchy. Because warfare was the main means of acquiring fertile land and trade routes, some of the most prominent monarchs in the ancient world made their initial mark as warrior-leaders. Thus, the military accomplishments of Octavius Caesar and later Augustus Caesar led to their position as emperor and to the institution of monarchy in the Roman Empire. Infrastructural programs and state-building also contributed to the development of monarchies. The need, common in arid cultures, to allocate fertile land and manage a regime of fresh water distribution, called hydraulic civilization, accounted for the founding of the ancient Chinese, Egyptian and Babylonian monarchies on the banks of rivers. The monarchs also had to prove themselves as state-builders.⁷

Monarchy also results from the wish of a society, be it a city population, tribe, or multi-tribal people, to groom an indigenous leader who will properly represent its historical achievements and advance its interests. Monarchy, therefore, rests on the cultural identity and symbolism of the society it represents, and in so doing it establishes that identity within the society while also projecting it to outsiders.

Difference between Monarchy and Democracy

Monarchy is political system based upon the undivided sovereignty or rule of a single person. The term applies to states in which supreme authority is vested in the monarch, an individual ruler who functions

as the head of state and who achieves his or her position through heredity. Most monarchies allow only male succession, usually from father to son.

Monarchy is a political system based on the sovereignty of a single ruler, whereas Democracy, a term that means “rule by the people”, is a political system in which laws, policies, leaders, and major state undertakings are decided directly or indirectly by the citizens

Successful and popular monarchs were believed to have the sacred right to rule: Some were regarded as gods, as in the case of the Egyptian Pharaohs or the Japanese Monarchs; Some were crowned by priests; Others were designated by prophets, example: King David of Israel. Still others were theocrats, leading both the religious and political spheres of their society, as did the Caliphs of the Islamic State from the 7th century A.D. They came from varying backgrounds; many leaders rose to power on the grounds of their abilities and charisma. Accordingly, monarchies proved capable of adapting to various social structures while also enduring dynamic cultural and geopolitical conditions. Thus, some ancient monarchies evolved as small city-states while others became large empires, the Roman Empire being the most appropriate example.

Decline of Monarchy and Rise of Republicanism

By the 17th century, monarchy was challenged by evolving parliamentarism through regional assemblies, and by modern anti-monarchism of the temporary overthrow of the English monarchy by the Parliament of England in 1649, the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789. While the advocacy of monarchies is called monarchism, the advocacy of the abolition of a monarchy or respectively of republics has been called republicanism. Consequently republics have become the opposing and alternative form of government to monarchy,⁸ despite some having seen infringements through lifelong or even hereditary heads of state, such as in North Korea.

Monarchies were the most common form of government until the 20th century, by which time republics had replaced many monarchies. Today forty-three sovereign nations in the world have a monarch, including fifteen Commonwealth realms that share King Charles III as their head of state. Other than that, there is a range of sub-national monarchical entities. Most of the modern monarchies tend to be constitutional monarchies, retaining under a constitution unique legal and ceremonial roles for the monarch, exercising limited or no political power, similar to heads of state in a parliamentary republic.

According to a 2020 study, monarchy arose as a system of governance because of inefficiency in governing large populations and expansive territories during periods when coordinating such populations was difficult. The authors argue that monarchy declined as an efficient regime type with innovations in communications and transportation technology, as the efficiency of monarchy relative to other regime types declined. With the rise of republicanism, a diverse division between republicanism developed in the 19th century politics, such as anti-monarchist radicalism and conservative or even reactionary monarchism. In

the following 20th century many countries abolished the monarchy and became republics, especially in the wake of World War I and World War II.

Monarchy being a form of government in which a person, the monarch, is head of State for life or until abdication, the political legitimacy and authority of the monarch may vary from restricted and largely symbolic (constitutional monarchy), to fully autocratic (absolute monarchy), and can span across executive, legislative, and judicial domains. The succession of monarchs in many cases has been hereditary, often building dynastic periods. However, elective and self-proclaimed monarchies have also been established throughout history.⁹ Aristocracy, though not an inherent form of monarchy, often serves as the pool of persons to draw the monarch from and fill the constituting institutions, like the diet and court, giving many monarchies oligarchic elements.

Conclusion

Today forty-three sovereign nations in the world have a monarch, including fifteen Commonwealth realms that have Charles III (Britain) as the head of State. Most modern monarchs are constitutional monarchs, who retain a unique legal and ceremonial role but exercise limited or no political power under a constitution. A number of the so-called crowned republics are found surviving, particularly in small states.

India as a nation has sustained democracy by confederating the many existing monarchies and principalities. It is sustained by the Constitution which ensures the fundamental rights of every citizen of the country, defining the responsibility of the government. It makes the government accountable to citizens. It declared itself a Sovereign, Democratic and Republic State with the adoption of the Constitution on January 26, 1950.

The Indian constitution is unique in that it balances national unity and authority with the preservation of state liberties, and it maintains the supremacy of the constitution by avoiding some of the flaws that a federal government would have. It is remarkable in that it establishes a single citizenship and an integrated judiciary. Despite the fact that India is a sovereign, democratic republic, it might equally be regarded as a constitutional monarchy without a monarch.¹⁰

The Constitution of India may be described as a compromise between the United Kingdom's Parliamentary and Cabinet systems and the United States' Presidential or non-parliamentary form of executive. The Ministry is the real executive because the President, as the head of the State, is expected to follow the advice of his Ministry. As a result, the executive and legislative branches of our government are not as intertwined as they are in the American Constitution. The Indian Constitution has adopted some of the best features of the various modern constitutions by establishing a unitary state with subsidiary federal features; rather, a federal state with subsidiary unitary features; in structure it is federal, in essence it is unitary,

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- ⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/monarchy/Premodern-monarchies>
- ⁸Bohn, H. G.,*The Standard Library Cyclopedia of Political, Constitutional, Statistical and Forensic Knowledge*. 1849, p. 640. A republic, according to the modern usage of the word, signifies a political community which is not under monarchical government in which one person does not possess the entire sovereign power.
- ⁹Malaysia is a special case. Malaysia’s Head of State, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (translated as "King"), is elected to serve a five-year term. However, he is elected from among the federation's subnational monarchies, each of whom inherit their position and rule for life.
- ¹⁰PrashantSharma “Constitutional Monarchy without the Monarch”, in <https://legalservicesindia.com/legal/article-803/legalservicesindia.com/legal/article-8034>