

CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY

CHAPTER COVERAGE

- ◆ Challenges to Democracy
 - (A) Foundational Challenge
 - (B) Challenge of Expansion
 - (C) Challenge of Deepening of Democracy
- ◆ Political Reforms to the Challenges
- ◆ Redefining Democracy
- ◆ Challenges to Indian Democracy

THINKING ABOUT CHALLENGES

(a) Foundational Change :

Different countries face different kinds of challenges. At least one fourth of the globe was still not under democratic government. The challenge for democracy in these parts of the world is very stark. These countries face the foundational challenge of making transition to democracy and then instituting democratic government. This involves, keeping military away from controlling government and establishing a sovereign and functional state.

(b) Challenge of Expansion :

Most of the established democracies face the challenge of expansion. This involves applying the basic principal of democratic government across all the regions, different social groups and various institutions. Ensuring greater power to local governments, extension of federal principle to all the units of the federation, inclusion of women and minority groups etc. falls under this challenge. This also means that less and less decisions should remain outside the arena of democratic control. Most countries including India and old democracies like the US face this challenge.

(c) Deepening of Democracy :

The third challenge, of deepening of democracy, faced by every democracy in the one form or another. This involves strengthening of the institutions and practices of democracy. This should happen in such a way that people can realize their expectations of democracy. But ordinary people have different expectations from democracy in different societies. Therefore this challenge takes different meaning and paths in different parts of the world. In concrete terms it usually means strengthening those institutions that help people's participation and control. This requires an attempt to bring down the control and influence of the rich and powerful people on decision making.

DIFFERENT CONTEXTS, DIFFERENT CHALLENGES

Case and context :

- (i) **Chile** : General Pinochet's government defeated, but military still in control of many institutions.

- (ii) **Poland** : After the first success of solidarity, the government imposed martial law and banned solidarity.
- (iii) **Ghana** : Just attained independence Nkrumah elected president.
- (iv) **Myanmar** : Suu Kyi under house arrest for more than 15 years army rulers getting global acceptance.
- (v) **International organisations** : US as the only super power disregards the UN and takes unilateral action.
- (vi) **Mexico** : Second free election after the defeat of PRI in 2000; defeated candidate alleges rigging.
- (vii) **China** : Communist Party adopts economic reforms but maintain monopoly over political power.
- (viii) **Pakistan** : General Musharraf hold referendum allegations of fraud in voters list.
- (ix) **Iraq** : Widespread sectarian violence as the new government fails to establish its authority.
- (x) **South Africa** : Mandela retires from active politics, pressure on his successor Mbeki to withdraw some concessions given to White minority.
- (xi) **US, Guantanamo Bay** : UN Secretary General calls this a violation of international law, US refused to respond.
- (xii) **Saudi Arabia** : Women not allowed to take part in public activities no freedom of religion for minorities.
- (xiii) **Yugoslavia** : Ethnic tension between Serbs and Albanians on the rise in the province of Kosovo Yugoslavia disintegrated.
- (xiv) **Belgium** : One round of constitutional change taken place, but the Dutch speakers not satisfied; they want more autonomy.
- (xv) **Sri Lanka** : The peace talks between the government and the LTTE breaks down renewed violence.
- (xvi) **US, Civil Right** : Blacks have won equal rights, but are still poor, less educated and marginalised.
- (xvii) **Ireland** : The civil war has ended but Catholics and Protestants yet to develop trust.
- (xviii) **Nepal** : Constituent Assembly about to be elect, unrest in Terai areas Maoists have not surrendered arms.
- (xix) **Bolivia** : Morales, a supporter of water struggle, becomes Prime Minister, MNCs threaten to leave the country.

➤ DIFFERENT TYPES OF CHALLENGES

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| (i) Constitutional design | (ii) Democratic rights | (iii) Working of institutions |
| (iv) Elections | (v) Federalism, decentralisation | (vi) Accommodation of diversity |
| (vii) Political organisation | (viii) Foundational challenge | (ix) Challenge of expansion |
| (x) Challenge of deepening | | |

In spite of being the largest democracy in the world Indian democracy also suffers from some challenges of its own nature. e.g., challenge of expansion, challenge of deepening democracy challenges of criminalisation and challenge of corruption.

- (i) **Challenge of Expansion** : This challenge of Indian democracy involves the practical aspects of
 - ◆ Ensuring greater power to local governments.
 - ◆ Extension of federal principles to all the units of the federation.
 - ◆ Inclusion of women and minority groups.

Although India has the federal nature of democracy based on decentralisation of power, the local self government is not implemented in a fair and just manner at every local or regional level because India has quasi-Federal nature of democratic setup which is unitary basis.

Women and minority groups still have not got a proper representation in the electoral politics of India. Hence, electoral reforms and political reforms have to be introduced in India.

- (ii) Presently, India is suffering from the challenges like casteism, communalism, political violence etc. casteism plays a dominant role in the Indian polity. There are many caste pressure groups like Scheduled Caste Federation, etc., which influence those who are in power by different methods to get their demands met. For example Political Parties like the AIDMK, DMK and BSP have come up to protect the interest of the backward classes communalism has also its negative implications in Indian politics like :

(a) It leads to the formation and growth of “Pressure groups to protect and promote specific interest of the community e.g., VHP etc.

(b) It also leads to intolerance, suspicion and fear towards members of the other communities.

Besides, there are various types of violence like caste, communal, electoral in our country.

(a) The most serious manifestation of political and social violence is the growth of “Terrorism”

(b) Rising state violence is assuming serious dimensions and harms the very foundation of democratic polity.

Thus, this challenge requires an attempt to bring down the control and influence of the rich and powerful people in governmental decision making.

(iii) **Challenge of Criminalisation :** This challenge of Indian democracy reflects :

- ◆ Money and muscle power, violence.
- ◆ Multiplicity of candidates.
- ◆ Lack of electoral ethics, insufficient representation of various sections of society like minorities and women etc have polluted the electoral process.

Hence, meaningful and comprehensive electoral reforms are urgently needed.

(iv) **Challenge of corruption :** This challenge of Indian democracy is related to the criminal record and personal possession of politicians. Now it is mandatory for every candidate who contests election to file on “Affidavit” giving details of his property and criminal cases pending against him. The new system has made a lot of information available to the public. But there is no system to check if the information given by candidates is true. As yet we do not know if it has led to decline in the influence of the rich and the criminals.

➤ THINKING ABOUT POLITICAL REFORMS

(i) No doubt, law has an important but limited role to play in political reform. Carefully devised changes in law can help to discourage wrong political practices and encourage good ones. But legal constitutional changes by themselves cannot overcome challenges to democracy.

(ii) Any legal change must carefully look at what results it will have on politics. Sometimes the results may be counter-productive.

For example many states have banned people who have more than two children from contesting panchayats elections. This has resulted in denial of democratic opportunity to many poor and women, which was not intended. Generally, laws that seek to ban something are not very successful in politics. Laws that give political actors incentives to do good things have more chances of working. The best laws are those which empowers the people to find out and act as watchdogs of democracy. Such a law helps to control corruption and supplements the existing laws that banned corruption and imposed strict penalties.

(iii) Democratic reforms are to be brought about principally through political practice. Therefore the main focus of political reforms should be on ways to strengthen democratic practice. As we discussed in the chapter on political parties, the most important concern should be increase and improve the quality of political participation by ordinary citizens.

(iv) Any proposal for political reforms should think not only about what is a good solution but also about who will implement it and why. It is not very wise to think that the parliaments will pass legislations that go against the interest of all the political parties and MPs. But measures that rely on democratic movements, citizen’s organisations and the media are likely to succeed.

Proposed reforms regarding doctors :

(i) The government should make it compulsory for the doctors to live in the village where they are posted, otherwise their service should be terminated.

(ii) District administration and police should carry out surprise raids to check the attendance of the doctors.

(iii) Village panchayat should be given the power to write the annual report of the doctor which should be read out in the Gram Sabha meeting.

- (iv) Problems like this can be solved only if Uttar Pradesh is split into several smaller states which can be administered more efficiently.

Proposed reforms regarding political funding :

- (i) The limit of the maximum expenditure allowed for any candidate (between 20-25 lakhs in most parts of the country in a Lok Sabha election) should be reduced further and strictly observed.
- (ii) The financial accounts of every political party should be made public. These accounts should be examined by government auditors.
- (iii) There should be state funding of elections. Parties should be given some money by the government to meet their election expenditure.

Citizens should be encouraged to give more donations to parties and to political workers. Such donations should be exempt from income tax.

➤ REDEFINING DEMOCRACY

For the expansion the definition slightly to add some qualifications -

- (i) The rules elected by the people must take all the major decisions.
- (ii) Elections must offer a choice and fair opportunity to the people to change the current rulers.
- (iii) This choice and opportunity should be available to all the people on an equal basis. and
- (iv) The exercise of this choice must lead to a government limited by basic rule of the constitution and citizens' rights.

You may have felt disappointed that the definition did not refer to any high deals that we associate with democracy.

Various aspects of democratic government and politics -

- (i) We discussed democratic rights at length and noted that these rights are not limited to the right to vote, stand in elections and form political organisation. We discussed some social and economic right that a democracy should offer to its citizens.
- (ii) We have taken up power sharing as the spirit of democracy and discussed how power sharing between governments and social groups is necessary in a democracy.
- (iii) We saw how democracy can not be the brute rule of majority and how a respect for minority voice is necessary for democracy.
- (iv) Our discussion of democracy has gone beyond the government and its activities. We discussed how eliminating discrimination based on these is important in a democracy.
- (v) Finally, we have had some discussion about some outcomes that one must expects from a democracy.

In doing so, we have not gone against the definition of democracy offered last year. We began then with a definition of what is the minimum country must have to be called a democracy. In the course of our discussion we have moved to the set of desirable conditions that a democracy should have. We have moved from the definition of democracy to the description of a good democracy.

GLOSSARY

1. **Challenges** : Difficulties which are significant and which can be overcome are known as challenges.
2. **Political Reforms** : Suggestions or proposals about overcoming various challenges to democracy are called “Democracy Reforms” or “Political Reforms”.
3. **Legal Constitutional Changes** : Legal ways of reforming politics and to think of new laws to ban undesirable things are known as the legal constitutional changes.
4. **Right to Information Act** : It is an act that empowers the people to find out what is happening in government and act as watchdogs of democracy.
5. **Bureaucracy** : It refers to the rule by the office or rule by the officials. The term denotes the organisation, officials and set procedures associated with any large administrative set up.
6. **Challenges to democracy** : It means various problems that come while ensuring a democratic set up in a country. A challenge is not just any problem.
7. **Forms of democracy** : There are two forms of democracy direct and indirect.
8. **Direct Democracy** : In the Direct democracy people govern themselves.
9. **Indirect Democracy** : People keep control on the government through their representatives.
10. **By Elections** : Due to the certain causes, if election held out of the normal schedule, are called by elections.