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23

CHALLENGES TO INDIAN DEMOCRACY

We are proud to be the largest democracy in the world. For more than sixty-five years we have witnessed the conduct of successful elections, peaceful changes of government at the Centre and in the States, people exercising freedom of expression, movement and religion. India has also been developing and transforming economically and socially. At the same time we, quite often, listen complains about prevalent inequalities, injustice or non-fulfillment of expectations of certain sections of the society. These people do not feel themselves participative in the democratic process. You may ask why it is so. You have already read in earlier unit that democracy means ‘government of the people, for the people, and by the people’. It means democracy is not limited to just a process of election, but also fulfilling social and economic aspirations of the people. In India we keep on debating these various aspects of democracy and its achievements and challenges. For a better understanding of the same, we discuss this in this lesson.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- understand the meaning of democracy in its different aspects;
- appreciate the introduction and development of democracy in India;
- identify major problems and challenges being faced by Indian democracy;
- recognize the corrective measures for improving the Indian democratic system; and
- explain the roles of citizens in making an efficient and successful democracy.

23.1 UNDERSTANDING DEMOCRACY

Let us begin with understanding the meaning of democracy and the conditions that are essential for its successful functioning. This will help us in appreciating the challenges to Indian democracy.

MODULE - 4

Contemporary India: Issues and Goals



Notes

Challenges to Indian Democracy

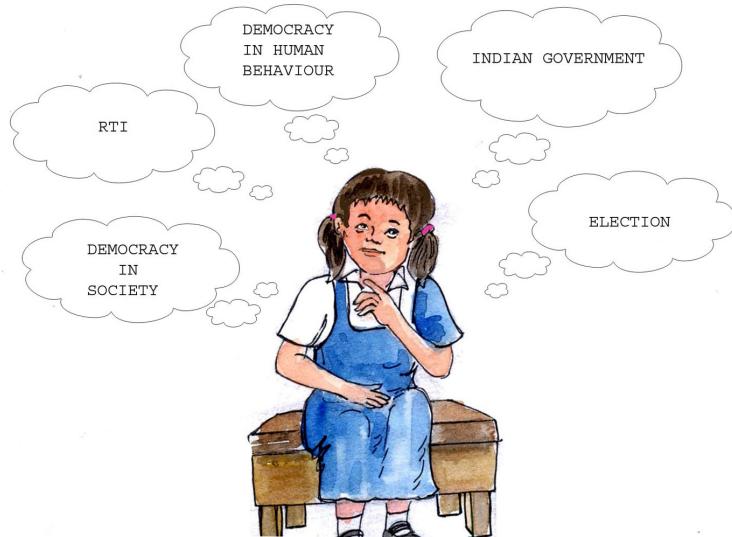


Figure 23.1 What exactly is Democracy?

23.1.1 Meaning of Democracy

Long back, former President of the United States of America, Abraham Lincoln said, “Democracy is a government of the people, for the people, and by the people.” The term ‘democracy’ comes from the Greek word *demokratia* which means “rule of the people”. It was coined from two words: *demos* that means “people” and *Kratos* which refers to “power”. That is, in a democracy the power rests with the people. This meaning is based on the experiences of the governments that existed in some of the Greek city-states, notably Athens. And, today also, democracy is defined as a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodic free elections. When you examine the definitions of democracy, as suggested above, you will find that most of those definitions define democracy as a form of government which is run by the elected representatives.

This statement defines democracy in the political context, but should democracy be defined only in the political context? Does this concept not have equal, if not more, relevance, in the social context or even in relation to self in our daily life?



ACTIVITY 23.1

Democracy has been defined in many ways. Bryce believes that “Democracy really means nothing more or less than the rule of the whole people, expressing their Sovereign will by their votes”.

MacIver observes, “Democracy is not a way of governing, whether by majority or otherwise, but primarily a way of determining, who shall govern, and broadly to what ends”.

Which aspect of democracy is reflected in these definitions, political, social or self?

You have seen above that in the present age democracy is just not limited to political democracy. It means more than a mere form of government. In its comprehensive form, democracy means, or ought to mean, (i) a form of government, (ii) a type of state, (iii) a pattern of social system, (iv) a design of economic order, and (v) a way of life and culture. Therefore, when we say that India is a democracy, we mean not only that its political institutions and processes are democratic but also that the Indian society and every Indian citizen is democratic, reflecting basic democratic values of equality, liberty, fraternity, secularism and justice in the social environment and individual behaviour.



ACTIVITY 23.2

Anil, a post-graduate student, lives in a joint family. His grandfather has fixed the marriage of one of his sisters who is 13 years old. The groom is 18 years old and is studying in class XII. Neither Anil nor his parents who are officers in the State government are in favour of this decision. But no one is able to assert the opinion, nor does his grandfather consult any one of them. Do you think there is democracy in Anil's family? **Which of the following statements do you consider are relevant and which are not relevant in this case and why?**

1. The decision in respect of the marriage of his sister at the age of 13 is undesirable, illegal and unethical.
2. The decision has been taken by the head of the family alone without consulting the girl whose life is going to be affected or other members of the family. The decision was taken as is being done traditionally since ages. This indicates that the social condition is undemocratic.
3. The individual behavior of other members of the family is undemocratic, as they have not expressed their opinion, even though they do not approve the decision.

23.1.2 Essential Conditions For Democracy

A system can be termed as a genuine and comprehensive democracy only when it fulfills both political and socio-economic aspects of people's participation and satisfaction. Let us identify those. There may be two major categories: (a) political conditions, and (b) social and economic conditions – the fulfillment of the first leads to political democracy and the second as social democracy.

Obviously, the first and the foremost, are political conditions of democracy. It is essential that for a system to be democratic, we must adopt a Constitution and laws that vest supreme power in the people. The human rights and



Notes

MODULE - 4

Contemporary India: Issues
and Goals



Notes

Challenges to Indian Democracy

fundamental rights, such as equality, liberty of thought and expression, belief, movement, communication and association must be protected by the Constitution. The democratic system has to have universal adult franchise as the basis of electing representatives at various levels of the government. Moreover, opportunities for political participation of all the citizens not only in elections at regular interval, but also in other aspects of the political process have to be made available. There has to be a responsible government in which the executive is answerable to the legislature, the legislature to the people and the Judiciary to remain independent. Political institutions like political parties and interest and pressure groups (associations, various non-governmental organizations) must be functional for expressing popular needs, demands and grievances. A democratic system is strengthened if it maintains an enlightened public opinion in its various forms through free press and other communication processes. Political democracy is thus one which incorporates all the above political traits. Can you think of a few more essentials of democracy, especially in the context of the ideas discussed in the previous lessons?

You may also be interested in knowing the social and economic conditions of democracy. A democratic system has to ensure that the social development is in tune with democratic values and norms reflecting equality of social status and opportunities for development, social security and social welfare. Citizens must avail opportunities of universal and compulsory education. They must also be enabled to utilize means of economic development. The fruits of economic development must reach all and especially to the poor and the deprived sections of the society. Socio-economic development of the people strengthens social democracy.



ACTIVITY 23.3

Think over the situation in India and identify at least two political and socio-economic conditions that are present and two that are not present in Indian democracy. List the same in the table shared below. One example has already been done for you.

Condition	Category	Present/Absent
Equal pay for equal work	Socio-economic	Absent



INTEXT QUESTIONS 23.1

1. What do you mean by political democracy?
2. Do you think, the definition of democracy is incomplete unless it is defined in social and individual contexts as well? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Write at least two essential conditions of political and social democracy.



Notes

23.2 CHALLENGES TO INDIAN DEMOCRACY

Since independence India has been functioning as a responsible democracy. The same has been appreciated by international community. It has successfully adapted to the challenging situations. There have been free and fair periodic elections for all political offices from the panchayats to the President. There has been smooth transfer of political power from one political party or set of political parties to others, both at national and state levels on many occasions. You will find many examples in our neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Myanmar and even Bangladesh where transfer of power has been done through military coups.

The legislative, executive and judicial organs have been functioning properly. The Parliament and the State Legislatures control the Executives effectively through the means like question hours, etc. More importantly, some significant enactments like the Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005, Right to Education 2009 and other welfare means have empowered the people. The mass media, including print and electronic, have full autonomy and play a key role in formulating and influencing public opinion. Significant social change has taken place in almost all walks of life and the nation is moving ahead on course of socio-economic development.

India is a very large country full of diversities – linguistically, culturally, religiously. At the time of independence it was economically underdeveloped. There were enormous regional disparities, widespread poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and shortage of almost all public welfare means. Citizens had enormous expectations from independence. As mentioned above, India has changed a lot. Yet, there are various challenges that the country faces in terms of fulfillment of expectations of various sections of society. The challenges come both from prevailing domestic and international conditions as well as lack of adequate prerequisites for a smooth functioning of democracy. These are discussed below.

23.2.1 Illiteracy

Illiteracy among people was a matter of grave concern for the successful functioning of democracy in India on the eve of independence and it still

MODULE - 4

Contemporary India: Issues
and Goals



Notes

Challenges to Indian Democracy

continues to be a major challenge. The level of education of citizens is a key to both the successful functioning of democracy and socio-economic development of the country. And perhaps, more importantly, it is an essential condition for human dignity. But the state of formal literacy was almost dismal when India achieved independence. The literacy rate in 1951 was mere 18.33 per cent and female literacy was negligible with 8.9 percent. It was, therefore, feared by many that the citizens would not be able to play their roles effectively and exercise their right to vote meaningfully which is an individual's expression of the power of the people.

As you also know, this apprehension, however, has been proved wrong by the Indian electorate over the years. In spite of a substantial number of them being illiterates, they have demonstrated maturity in the exercise of their right to vote on more than one occasion thus resulting peaceful transfer of political power since independence. The Indian National Congress under the leadership of Ms. Indira Gandhi was very popular and powerful during the early part of 1970s. But in 1977's general election, the people of India rejected her primarily because of the misuse of power during emergency in 1975-1977 and provided an opportunity to the first non-Congress government at the Centre in form of the Janata Party. After that there have been changes in the governments both at the Centre and in the States almost regularly.

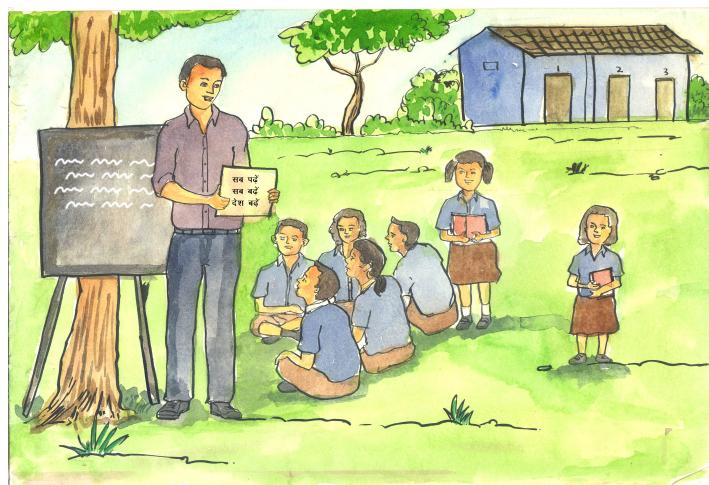


Figure 23.2 Children Getting Education

Literacy is necessary not simply for enabling citizens to participate in elections and exercise their right to vote effectively, it has other important implications as well. Literacy enables citizens to be aware of various issues, problems, demands, and interests in the country. It also makes them conscious of the principles of liberty and equality of all and ensures that the representatives elected by them truly represent all the interests in the society. Universal literacy is therefore a must for the successful functioning of Indian democracy. Although according to 2011 Census, the literacy rate has risen to 74.04 per cent, the female

literacy rate is still lagging at 65.46 per cent. This means that over one-fourth of the country's population is still illiterate while among women nearly one out of three is not literate. If the children have access to basic education, the problem of illiteracy can be checked. Recently, the Right to Education is provided as a fundamental right. We hope that this will help the cause of educating the children universally.

23.2.2 Poverty

It is generally said that for a hungry person right to vote does not have any meaning. For him/her the first requirement is food. Therefore, poverty is considered as the greatest bane of democracy. It is, in fact, the root cause of all kinds of deprivations and inequalities. It is the state of denial of opportunities to people to lead a healthy and fulfilling life. Of course, India inherited poverty from the long exploitative British colonial rule, but it continues to be one of the gravest problems today. Even now a considerable proportion of Indian population lives below poverty line, called 'BPL'. **The poverty line means an income level below which human beings cannot provide for their basic necessities of food, much less for clothes and shelter.** The governmental definition of poverty line during the 1960s sought to measure the extent of poverty on the amount of income required to purchase a bare minimum desirable food having nutritional standards of caloric intake by a person. According to it, in Indian conditions, a person in rural areas needs an average of 2400 calories per day and in urban areas an average of 2100 calories per day in order to keep himself above the poverty line.

During the 1990s non-food items like clothes, employment, shelter, education, etc. got included in the definition of poverty.

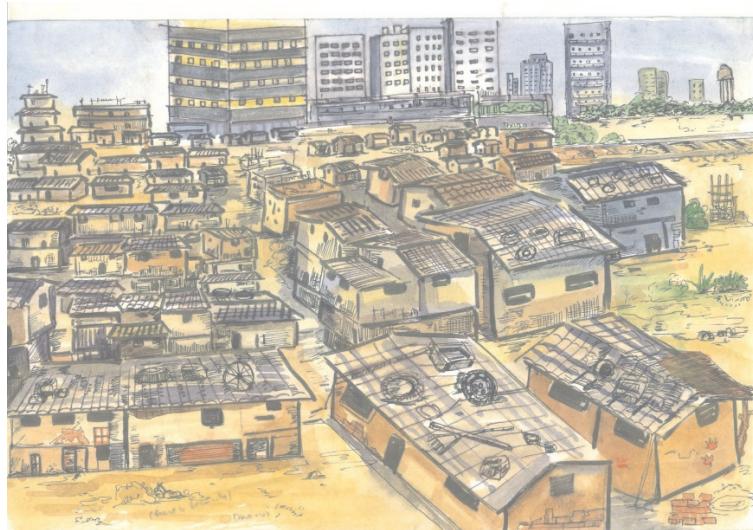


Figure 23.3 Poverty in the neighbourhood of affluence



Notes

MODULE - 4

Contemporary India: Issues and Goals



Notes

Challenges to Indian Democracy

Poverty in the contemporary phase is linked with systemic deprivation of rights. It is also associated with the notion of Human Development Index (HDI) as championed by Mabud-ul-Haq and Amartya Sen. Viewed from the HDI perspective, the definition of poverty also includes socio-economic-political and human rights issues under its ambit.



Do you know

Based on the current criteria, the Planning Commission estimated the poverty ratio to be 28.3 per cent in rural areas, 25.7 per cent in urban areas and 27.5 per cent for the country as a whole in 2004-05. India was ranked 134 out of 182 countries of the world by Human Development Report 2009 of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The persisting phenomenon of poverty is attributed to many factors, one of which is mass unemployment and under-employment. A large number of people in rural areas do not have regular and adequate work. In urban areas also the number of educated unemployed is very high. The growing population is regarded as a reason for poverty, though population is considered as the greatest resource in the country. In fact, the process of economic development has not been able to ensure social justice and gap between rich and poor has not been bridged. Because of all this, poverty continues to remain a great challenge to Indian democracy.

23.2.3 Gender Discrimination

Discrimination against girls and women exists in every walk of life. You must have had such experiences of prevailing gender inequality in our society and polity. But we know that gender equality is one of the basic principles of democracy. The Constitution of India enjoins upon the State to ensure that men and women are treated as equals and there is no discrimination against women. Fundamental Rights and Fundamental Duties as well as the Directive Principles of State Policy make these intentions very clear.



Figure 23.4 Daughter doing Household Chores and Son going to School



Notes

But the discrimination against females continues to be a fact of life. It is clearly reflected in the sex ratio, child sex ratio and maternal mortality rate. The number of females in comparison to males has been declining ever since 1901. In 1901, the sex ratio was 972 females per 1000 males. It came down to 927 females per 1000 males in 1991. According to 2011 Census it is 940 females per 1000 males which is still very unfavourable to females. In some of the States, the 2011 Census reported a very low sex ratio of 877 females per 1000 males (Haryana), the lowest being 618 in Daman & Diu and 866 in the NCT of Delhi.

The child sex ratio is a matter of greater concern. According to 2011 Census, the child sex ratio (0-6 years) in India is only 914 female children per 1000 male children. This is lower than the 2001 Census which reported child sex ratio of 927 female children per 1000 male children. It has been declining because of several factors, like the prevailing preference for male child, discriminatory treatment against the girl child right after birth, and the increasing incidence of female infanticides and female foeticides. By using technology, people are forcing mothers to get the fetus of a female child aborted. The infant mortality rate among girl children is high, as compared to that among boy children. The maternal mortality ratio as per the Sample Registration System 2004-06 is 254 per lakh live births, which is considered very high.



ACTIVITY 23.4

Sonu Khatun is a native of Assam. She is one of the increasing number of bridges getting married in Haryana. Haryana has an unfavourable sex ratio between men and women. The Red Cross Society of India which campaigns against the female infanticide and foeticide in the country in one of its reports in 2010 pointed out that at least 100 brides were brought into Bhiwani, one of the 21 districts of Haryana.

(Adapted from the print edition (International) *The Economist*, 4 March, 2010)

Read the case stated above and answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think Sona Khatun from Assam got married in Haryana?
2. Identify at least three States where the sex ratio is very low.

Besides these demographic indicators, gender discrimination is very much apparent in the context of economic and social development. The female literacy rate in India in 2011 is 65.46 percent, whereas the male literacy rate is 82.14 per cent. Females are discriminated in respect of both employment and their representation in public life. No doubt, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional

MODULE - 4

Contemporary India: Issues
and Goals



Notes

Challenges to Indian Democracy

Amendments, 1993 providing 33 per cent reservation of seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions, Municipalities and Municipal Corporations have facilitated the course of political empowerment of women. However, traditionally women have been subordinated in the society, which restricts their participation in every field. This has been true for women belonging to more or less all classes and communities. Women Reservation Bill (providing 33 per cent of reservation of women in Parliament) has yet to be passed despite a very low ratio of women in both the Houses of the Parliament.

The Women Reservation Bill was meant to increase the proportion of women in Parliament to provide opportunities for equal political participation. While most parties agree on the need for such a Bill, none of them has given it a priority.



Do you know

The Bihar Panchayat Amendment Bill, 2006 has extended reservation for women in the three-tier Panchayati Raj system to 50 per cent. Elections in the state have seen 54 per cent of the seats being won by women panchayat members. The State now boasts 2 lakh women panchayat members. Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal also have 50 per cent reservation for women in panchayats.

23.2.4 Casteism, Communalism, Religious Fundamentalism

The Indian democracy faces serious challenges also from casteism, communalism and religious fundamentalism. They weaken the functioning and stability of democratic system.

- (a) **Casteism:** The caste system which presumably originated in the division of labour in the ancient society has become a more or less rigid group classification, based on birth. Have you ever experienced the role of caste in your life and society? You will agree that the most detrimental and inhuman aspect of the caste system is the practice of untouchability which is continuing in spite of the constitutional ban imposed on it. This has led to segregation of so called low castes or 'Dalits', depriving them of education and other social benefits. The Dalits have been typically performing menial labour and some of the hardest physical work in society. Casteism has played a negative role even in the democratic political processes. In fact, casteism has become notorious as a strategy of exploitation of caste consciousness for narrow political gains. The caste system acts against the roots of democracy. The democratic facilities - like fundamental rights relating to equality, freedom of speech, expression and association, participation in the electoral process, free media and press, and even legislative forums - are misused for maintaining casteist identity.



Notes

Casteism has also been contributing towards continuation of socio-economic inequalities. It is true that India has been an unequal society from times immemorial. The Scheduled Castes (SCs), the Scheduled Tribes (STs) and the backward classes have suffered down the ages from socio-economic deprivations. There are enormous inequalities in our society which are posing serious challenge to Indian democracy.

What is more alarming is the mixing of caste and politics resulting into ‘politicization of caste’ and ‘casteization of politics’ in contemporary Indian polity which has become a grave challenge to our democracy. Despite the era of liberalization and globalization caste consciousness has not been eroded in our society and castes are being increasingly used as vote bank politics.

- (b) **Communalism:** Communalism and religious fundamentalism have acquired a very dangerous form and alarming proportion in India. They disrupt the pattern of co-existence in our multi-religious society. Communalism is an affront to India’s nationalist identity and a tragic setback to its evolving secular culture. It is subversive of our democratic political stability and destroyer of our glorious heritage of humanism and composite culture. Quite often, communalism is wrongly used as a synonym for religion or conservatism. Adherence to a religion or attachment to a religious community is not communalism.

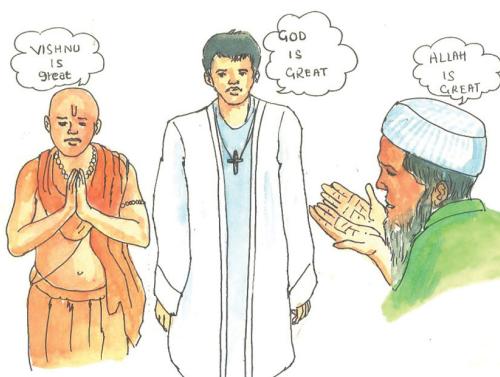


Figure 23.5 My Religion is the Greatest

Although conservatism represents social backwardness, it does not mean communalism either. As a matter of fact, communalism is an ideology of political allegiance to a religious community. It uses one religious community against other communities and perceives other religious communities as its enemies. It is opposed to secularism and even humanism. One of the manifestations of communalism is communal riots. In recent past also, communalism has proved to be a great threat to our social and political life on several occasions. Can you recollect some communal incidents that have occurred in the recent past?

**(c) Religious Fundamentalism**

Religious fundamentalism also reinforces communalists in exploiting both religion and politics. In fact, fundamentalism acts as an ideology which advocates a return to orthodoxy and a strict compliance to the fundamental tenets of religion. Religious fundamentalists vehemently oppose progressive reforms in order to establish their exclusive control on their respective communities.

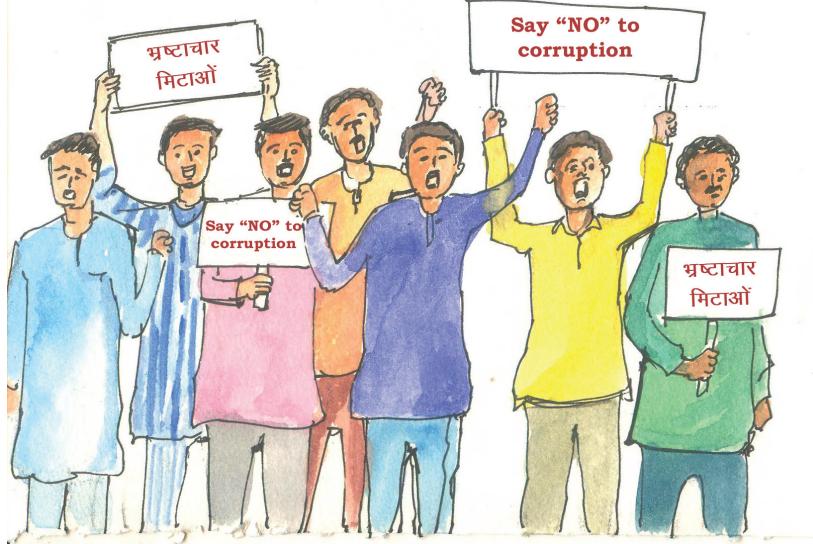
23.2.5 Regionalism

Indian democracy has also been struggling with regionalism which is primarily an outcome of regional disparities and imbalances in development. We all know that India is a plural country with diversities of religions, languages, communities, tribes and cultures. A number of cultural and linguistic groups are concentrated in certain territorial segments. Although development process in the country aims at growth and development of all regions, the regional disparities and imbalances in terms of differences in per capita income, literacy rates, state of health and educational infrastructure and services, population situation and levels of industrial and agricultural development continue to exist. Existence and continuation of regional inequalities both among States and within a State create a feeling of neglect, deprivation and discrimination. This situation has led to regionalism manifested in demands for creation of new States, autonomy or more powers to States or even secession from the country.

It is true that regionalism and sub-regionalism are unavoidable in a vast and plural country like India. It is not always correct to consider every attempt to support or defend regional or sub-regional interests as divisive, fissiparous and unpatriotic. The problem begins when these interests are politicized and regional movements are promoted for ulterior political motives. Such unhealthy regional or sub-regional patriotism is cancerous and disruptive. The continuing regional imbalances have given rise to militant movements in certain parts of our country. Separatist demands in Jammu and Kashmir or by ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) in Assam or by different groups in the North-Eastern region are matters of grave concern for Indian polity.

23.2.6 Corruption

Corruption in public life has been a major concern in India. In 2011, India was ranked 95th of 183 countries defined as corrupt in Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index* (CPI). In fact, corruption is rampant in all walks of life, be it land and property, health, education, commerce and industry, agriculture, transport, police, armed forces, even religious institutions or so-called places of spiritual pursuits. Corruption continues to exist in covert and overt ways at all three levels - political, bureaucratic and corporate sector. One can see the nexus between the politicians, the bureaucrats and the industrialists which has resulted into corruption and corrupt practices. The tentacles of corruption have affected all organs of government, including the judiciary.



Notes

Figure 23.6 Campaign Against Corruption

Above all, corruption in electoral processes and bribing of voters who participate in elections at different levels has now become a common practice. Have you or your friends observed this happening during elections in the recent past? In recent years, various scams have been coming out in our country in quick succession. In fact, corruption is a sign of political instability and institutional decay, challenging seriously the validity and propriety of governance. We as citizens should take a vow not to indulge in corrupt practices at any level and contribute in eliminating corruption from our country.

23.2.7 Criminalization of Politics

In recent years, criminalization of politics in India has become a debatable issue. There have been allegations that there are some elements in politics who do not have faith in democratic values and practices. They indulge in violence and take refuge in other unhealthy, undemocratic methods to win elections. Undoubtedly, this is not a healthy trend in politics and there is an urgent need to apply serious check on such tendencies.

Criminalization of politics is the very negation of democratic values and has no place in a democratic set up. Democracy can be strengthened by adopting and promoting democratic values and shunning criminal activities.

Recently, the judiciary, while taking a serious note of criminal tendencies in politics, has showed signs of adopting remedial measures to apply a serious check on such elements. The Central government and many State governments have been taking steps to address this issue effectively. This is a matter of great satisfaction and a healthy sign for the successful functioning of democracy in our country. We, as awakened citizens and as voters of the largest democracy in the world, can also contribute by discouraging such persons who have a criminal background, from contesting elections.

MODULE - 4

Contemporary India: Issues
and Goals



Notes

Challenges to Indian Democracy

23.2.8 Political Violence

Violence has been with us for long, but use of violence for political end is dangerous for the existence of any system. In India we have been witnessing various forms of violence. Communal violence, caste violence and political violence in general have attained serious proportion. Communal riots are engineered by vested interests for political, religious and economic reasons. Caste violence in various shapes has been increasing. Despite agricultural development, abolition of *zamindari system*, and developments like green revolution and white revolution, there are still powerful feudal elements in the society. A serious conflict of interests has emerged between higher and middle castes and this has led to aggressive competition for political power which many a time leads to violence.



Figure 23.7 Protest becoming Violent

Another aspect of caste violence is the backlash of the higher castes against the growing awareness and assertion of their rights by the Dalits and lower castes, particularly the Scheduled Castes and the backward castes. During elections, violence is being adopted either to mobilize voters or to prevent them from exercising their right to vote. Moreover, violence has been associated with demands for separate States, reorganization of States or adjustment of State boundaries. Violence has also been used quite frequently during industrial strikes, farmers' movements, and students' agitations.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 23.2

1. How do illiteracy, inequality and poverty adversely affect the functioning of Indian democracy?
2. Do you agree that the portrayal of women by popular entertainment channels or films depict gender discrimination? Justify with examples.

3. Explain with two examples as how do casteism or communalism impact our day to day lives and influence Indian democracy?
4. If regionalism and sub-regionalism are inseparable part of Indian democracy, why are they considered as challenges?
5. What are the reasons for criminalization of politics in India?
6. What are the reasons of increase of political violence in India?

Notes

23.3 CORRECTIVE MEASURES

It is thus clear that democracy in India faces certain serious challenges. These are causes of serious concern to all. In fact, the leadership of the freedom movement and especially the framers of the Indian Constitution themselves were very much aware of these issues. They made a number of constitutional provisions to address the same. Since independence governments have taken various measures to respond to many of these challenges. There have been significant improvements in some of these. However, lots still have to be done. For that, efforts have been going on. There is need for collaboration among governmental agencies, political parties, civil society and citizens in general. Certain significant corrective measures that have been adopted and can be initiated are as follows:

23.3.1 Universal Literacy ‘Education for All’

The significance and necessity of education for efficient functioning of democracy was appreciated by the framers of the Indian Constitution. Which is why, free and compulsory education to all children up to the fourteen years of age continued to remain constitutional commitment in India. Various governments at national and state levels have been making efforts to attain this goal. As a follow up of the National Policy on Education 1986, a National Literacy Mission was set up in 1988 to plan and implement programmes for the removal of illiteracy under the platform, **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan**. But the goal of universal literacy is yet to be attained. Currently a nation-wide programme known as **Saakshar Bharat** is being implemented. It aims at developing functional literacy and numeracy to non-literate and non-numerate adults in the age group of fifteen and above, to enable them to continue their learning beyond basic literacy and acquire equivalence to formal educational system. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan



Figure 23.8



is a flagship programme for universalization of elementary education for children between 6-14 years of age. Further, the Parliament of India in 2009 passed the *Right to Education Act* through which education has become a fundamental right for all children of age group 6-14 years.

23.3.2 Poverty Alleviation

From the 1970s, a number of programmes have been implemented for alleviation of poverty in India. These programmes fall into two broad categories: (i) There are programmes to lift beneficiaries above poverty line by providing them with productive assets or skills or both, so that they can employ themselves usefully and earn greater income. (ii) Programmes are also being implemented to provide temporary wage employment for the poor and the landless.



Do you know

In 1999, Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) was conceived as a holistic programme of micro enterprise development in rural areas with emphasis on organizing the rural poor into self-help groups (SHGs), capacity-building, planning of activity clusters, infrastructure support, technology, credit and marketing linkages. This programme has impacted many rural poor, for example, in Mathur, a village of the Dharmapuri district of Tamil Nadu, 100 women from eight self-help groups were trained in fruit processing by a non-government organization (NGO). They availed assistance under SGSY to run a fruit processing unit registered under the name of Sathyamurthi Mahalir Mandram in May 2000. The unit produces fruit squash, jam, ready-to-serve beverages, pickle, etc. Apart from raising the economic status of the group members, this venture has made the members more aware and they are actively involved in the government schemes, camps and campaigns. They have made significant representations for ensuring provision of basic facilities in their village and by bringing overall development of the area.

Similarly, the Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY) is a programme for the creation of rural economic infrastructure with employment generation as a secondary objective. The programme is implemented by the village panchayats and since its inception it has generated 27 crore men-days of employment each year. The Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) covers 1,778 drought-prone, desert, tribal and hill area blocks. The programme was designed to provide employment in the form of manual work in the lean agricultural season. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) is being implemented to enhance the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

23.3.3 Elimination of Gender Discrimination

It is now being recognized that the goals of democracy “of the people, for the people and by the people” cannot be fully realized if the female population are not included in all ways in the processes of socio-economic and political development. That is why, besides constitutional provisions, several laws have been enacted, policies have been made and implemented, and institutional reforms have been carried out for the development of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments of Indian Constitution in 1993 are the milestones in the process of political empowerment of women. These Amendments have reserved one-third of the seats in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, Municipalities and Municipal Corporations. Another significant development has been the adoption of the National Policy for Empowerment of Women in 2001, the overarching goal of which is to “bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.” But a lot needs to be done to attain this goal.



Do you know

Goal and Objectives of National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001

The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include:

- (i) creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential;
- (ii) equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation;
- (iii) equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office, etc.;
- (iv) strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women; and
- (v) elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child.



Notes

23.3.4 Removal of Regional Imbalance

Redressing regional imbalances has indeed been a vital objective of the planning process in India. Efforts are on to reduce regional disparities. Besides, the State-specific efforts for reducing intra-State regional disparities, a number of Centrally Sponsored Programmes have been in operation for the last two to three decades for taking care of specific aspects of backwardness of such regions.



Are you aware of any such programme being implemented in your area? Some of the major programmes are: (i) the Tribal Development Programme, (ii) the Hill Area Development Programme, (iii) the Border Area Development Programme, (iv) the Western Ghat Development Programme, (v) the Drought Prone Area Programme and (vi) the Desert Development Programme.

For the development of North-East states, a certain percentage is earmarked from the budget for each developmental scheme or programme in the region.

While the development of the backward regions is a national responsibility, the State and the local leadership also have significant role to play. Unless the local leadership – political, bureaucratic and intellectual – resolves to usher in development based on sharing the benefits on egalitarian basis with the masses, results will be hard to come by. Resources are not the real constraints; it is the way resources are spent that remains the fundamental concern.

23.3.5 Administrative and Judicial Reforms

The success of all the above stated corrective measures primarily depends on the efficient functioning of administration and independence and righteousness of the judicial system. But on both counts, a lot needs to be done. The performance of public administration in India has come under close scrutiny in the last few years. Rampant corruption, inefficiencies, wastages and irresponsiveness to the needs of citizens are some of the commonly acknowledged problems afflicting the administration. No doubt, the Indian judiciary has remained independent and neutral; there are serious problems of (i) slow disposal of cases leading to delays as well as accumulation of backlog, and (ii) very low rate of prosecution in criminal cases.

Administrative reforms have continuously been on the agenda of the government ever since independence. A number of Commissions and Committees have been set up in this regard. But bureaucratic reluctance to change has prevented the reforms to take place in full measure. The recommendations of various Commissions and Committees focus around the need (i) to make administration accountable and citizen friendly, (ii) to build its capacity for quality governance, (iii) to orient administration for promoting peoples' participation, decentralization and devolution of powers, (iv) to make administrative decision-making process transparent, (v) to improve the performance and integrity of the public services, (vi) to reinforce ethics in administration, and (vii) to inculcate readiness for e-governance.

Judicial reform also has been a critical concern since long. Various recommendations have been made on many occasions. The major issues that need consideration in this regard are : (a) Simplification of Rules and Procedures, (b) Repealing Out-dated Laws, (c) Increase in the Judge Population Ratio, (d) Time-bound filling of Vacant Posts in Judiciary, (d) Transparency in Appointment, Promotion and Transfer of Judges, (e) Judicial Accountability; and (f) Transparency of Court Proceedings.

23.3.6 Sustainable Development (Economic, Social, Environmental)

Indian democracy can adequately respond to all the challenges when it moves forward on the path of sustainable development. A model of development without taking into account the basic needs of millions, today as well as in the future, cannot be conducive for the survival of democracy. Development has to be human-centred and directed towards improvement of quality of life of all the people. It has to be focused on removal of poverty, ignorance, discrimination, disease and unemployment. The development process has to aim at sustained economic, social and environmental development.



Do you know

Sustainable development is a pattern of using resources that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for future generations to come. The term was used by the Brundtland Commission (1987) which coined what has become the most often-quoted definition of sustainable development as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”



Notes



INTEXT QUESTIONS 23.3

1. Describe the measures undertaken to achieve the goals of universal literacy, poverty alleviation and removal of gender discrimination?
2. Discuss the steps needed for solving the problem of regional imbalances in India?
3. What needs to be done to reform administration and judiciary in India?
4. What is sustainable development? How will it strengthen Indian democracy?

23.4 ROLE OF CITIZENS IN A DEMOCARCY

As citizens of India, do we really appreciate the role of a citizen in a democracy? Why is this role so important? Generally, it is believed that the government rules the people who have to respect the political authority and obey it. They are there to be governed. But don't you think that this is not so in a democracy? The people who are citizens in a democratic system like India cannot and ought not remain passive and treat themselves as governed. In fact, a democracy can be successful and vibrant only when citizens imbibe and reflect in their mindset, thinking and behaviour the basic values like equality, freedom, secularism, social justice, accountability and respect for all. They have to appreciate the opportunities for their desired roles and play proactive roles to actualize the goals of democracy.



23.4.1 Appreciation of Opportunities for Citizens' Role

The opportunities as democratic citizens are available in all democracies, but they vary from one democratic system to another. Indian democracy in the modern sense began after a long period of colonial rule. Although the democratic system started just after independence in 1947, its socio-cultural settings were and still are not in tune with the democratic culture. India is a vast multi-cultural, multi-lingual, truly plural society, which in many respects still carries the characteristics of traditionalism. At the same time it is trying to absorb the values of modern democracy. Even now many think that the government has to rule and do everything, and if things are not happening in an expected manner, it is only the government which is to be blamed. As you know, the democratic government in our country is run by the representatives chosen by us. In that sense, every citizen is responsible for how the governments functions at different levels: national, state and local. And hence, every citizen has to play a critical role and use every opportunity for doing so. As Indian citizens are we doing it? Let us consider. Major opportunities for roles of citizens may be as follows:

(a) Participation

The key role of citizens in a democracy is to participate in public life. The most commonly observed opportunity of participation is exercising the right to vote during elections. And in order to vote wisely it is necessary that each citizen listens to and knows the views of different parties and candidates, and then makes his or her own decision on whom to vote for. It is also learnt that in many cases the percentage of voting is still low. The Election Commission is doing its best to educate the people about importance of participation in elections.

Participation in a democratic polity, however, is not confined simply to participation in elections only. A vital form of participation comes through membership of political parties and more importantly, active membership in independent non-governmental organizations, that are known as "civil society organizations." These organizations represent a variety of interests of different groups such as women, students, farmers, workers, doctors, teachers, business owners, religious believers, human rights activists. Such organizations and people's movements help to bring political awareness about different issues among the people.

(b) Making the System Accountable

Participation in the political process is not enough. Citizens have to make the democratic system responsive and responsible. The Constitution makes the executive responsible to the legislature, but citizens are needed to ensure that the Parliamentarians, Members of State Legislatures and their representatives in Panchayati Raj and Municipal Institutions are accountable. The instruments created by the Right to Information Act, 2005 in our country enable citizens to play their role effectively. Citizens have an obligation to become informed



Notes

about public issues, to watch carefully how their political leaders and representatives use their powers, and to express their own opinions and interests. When citizens find that the government is not living up to its promises; they can point it out through media, make recommendations and demands accountability from the government. If the government still fails to fulfill promises, citizens may protest, carry out peaceful satyagraha, civil disobedience or non-cooperation campaigns to make the government accountable.

(c) Fulfilling Obligations

We should realize that citizenship is more than voting or making the system accountable. Many people tend to regard democracy as a system where literally everything is allowed. And every person has the freedom to do whatever one desires. This often leads to a complete chaos that devastates the order of the society rather than improving it. In that way it leads to the opposite effects of democracy. A citizen has to accept that freedom is never absolute. If you have a right to do certain things, you have also the responsibility to ensure that your actions do not infringe upon the rights of others.

23.5 PROACTIVE ROLE TO ACTUALIZE CORRECTIVE MEASURES

For a successful working of democracy, citizens' participation is a must. The corrective measures to meet the challenges can be actualized only when citizens play a proactive role. The citizens must respect the law and reject violence. Every citizen must respect the rights of his or her fellow citizens, and their dignity as human beings. No one should denounce a political opponent as evil, just because of holding different views. People should question the decisions of the government, but not reject the government's authority. Every group has the right to practice its culture and to have some control over its own affairs, but each group should accept that it is a part of a plural society and democratic state.

When you express your opinion, you should also listen to the views of other people, even people you disagree with. Everyone has a right to be heard. When you make demands, you should understand that in a democracy, it is impossible for everyone to achieve everything one wants. Democracy requires mutual cooperation. Groups with different interests and opinions must be willing to sit down with one another and negotiate. If one group is always excluded and fails to be heard, it may turn against democracy in anger and frustration. Everyone who is willing to participate peacefully and respect the rights of others should have some say in the way the country is governed.

It is also important that citizens must assert their opinion, as in a democracy not asserting your opinion also means that you are agreeing with the decision which you may consider improper. You have seen in Activity 23.2, how members of Anil's family did not assert their opinion against the decision of the head of the family.

MODULE - 4

Contemporary India: Issues
and Goals



Notes

Challenges to Indian Democracy



ACTIVITY 23.5

Now that you have understood the roles a democratic citizen plays, you will find it interesting to explore how democratic you yourself are?

Below are given some statements in a table, write whether the statements are right or wrong.

S.No.	Statement	Right/Wrong
1.	Right To Information Act, 2005 is an effective tool to be used by the citizens to make the government accountable.	
2.	Everyone in your society is treated equal, whether he/she belongs to any economic or social strata.	
3.	In your family, women and girls are not always considered equal to men and boys.	
4.	You believe that you should never act in a way that affects the rights of others.	
5.	The system of reservations for females, members of SCs/STs and minorities is not good for Indian democracy.	



INTEXT QUESTIONS 23.4

1. What do you mean by participation of citizens in the democratic process?
2. What are the various forums or tools available to a common citizen for making the government accountable?
3. Fill in the Blanks:
 - (a) If you have a right to do certain things, you have also to ensure that your actions do not infringe upon the of others.
 - (b) Citizens must respect the and reject
 - (c) Every group has the right to practice its and to have some over its own affairs.
 - (d) When a citizen expresses his/her he/she should also listen to the of other people.



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- Democracy is a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodic free elections. However, it is defined not only in the political context, but also in social context or even in relation to self.
- A system can be termed as a genuine and comprehensive democracy, a successfully functioning democracy, only when it fulfils certain political, social and economic conditions. Based on the fulfillment of these conditions one can broadly witness two types of democracy in a given set up – Political Democracy and Social Democracy.
- Indian Democracy over the years has been able to articulate many of these essential conditions. It is confronting a number of challenges that at times bring out the distortions which have crept in and also indicate the possible threats to its future. Illiteracy, social and economic inequality, poverty, gender discrimination, casteism, communalism and religious fundamentalism, regionalism, corruption, criminalization, political violence and militancy are the major challenges that need to be addressed.
- The corrective measures that are needed to meet the challenges to Indian democracy are focussed around the issues and concerns like universal literacy i.e. education for all, poverty alleviation, elimination of gender discrimination, removal of regional imbalances, administrative and judicial reforms and sustained economic, social and environmental development.
- However, Indian democracy can be successful and vibrant only when its citizens imbibe and reflect in their behavior the basic democratic values like equality, freedom, social justice, accountability and respect for all. Their mindset, thinking and behavior are expected to be in tune with the essential conditions of democracy. They have to appreciate the opportunities for their desired roles like participation, making the system accountable, fulfilling obligations, and playing proactive roles to actualize the goals of democracy.



Notes



TERMINAL EXERCISES

1. Define democracy. Why democracy cannot be defined only in political context?
2. Describe the essential conditions for a successful democracy.
3. What are the major challenges the Indian democracy faces? How these challenges are opportunities to make India an effective democratic system.

MODULE - 4

Contemporary India: Issues
and Goals



Notes

Challenges to Indian Democracy

4. Examine the trends of protest and violence in India. Why do some protests turn into violent movements?
5. What are the significant corrective measures that are required to meet the challenges to Indian democracy?
6. Discuss the expected roles of citizens in Indian democracy, especially in the context of the experiences of Indian society and government.
7. What are the qualities that need to be reflected in an individual to be an Indian citizen in true sense?
8. Write some qualities of a good citizen.



ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

23.1

1. Democracy is defined as a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and is exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodic free elections. In essence, democracy is a form of government which is run by the elected representatives of the people.
2. The definition of democracy is incomplete unless it is defined in social and individual contexts as well. In the present age, it means more than a mere form of government. In its comprehensive form, democracy means, (i) a form of government, (ii) a type of state, (iii) a pattern of social system, (iv) a design of economic order, and (v) a way of life and culture. Therefore, when we say Indian democracy, we mean not only that its political institutions and processes are democratic but also that the Indian society and every Indian citizen is democratic, reflecting basic democratic values of equality, liberty, fraternity, secularism and justice in social sphere and individual behaviour.
3. A system can be termed as a genuine democracy only when it fulfils (a) political conditions as follows: (i) having a Constitution that vests supreme power in the people and protects fundamental rights, such as equality, liberty of thought and expression, belief, movement, communication and association; (ii) having universal adult franchise as the basis of electing representatives; and (iii) having a responsible government in which the executive is answerable to the legislature and the legislature to the people; and (b) social and economic conditions as follows: (i) the system ensuring social development that is in tune with democratic values and norms reflecting equality of social status, social security and social welfare; and (ii) the system facilitating a situation where the fruits of economic development reach all and especially the poor and deprived sections of the society.

23.2

1. Illiteracy, inequality and poverty adversely affect the functioning of Indian democracy. (i) Illiterate citizens are not able to play their roles effectively and exercise meaningfully their right to vote which is an individual expression of the power of the people. Literacy enables citizens to be aware of various issues, problems, demands, and interests in the country, be conscious of the principles of liberty and equality of all and ensure that the representatives elected by them truly represent all the interests in the society. (ii) Poverty is perhaps the greatest bane of democracy. It is the root cause of all kinds of deprivations and inequalities and is the state of denial of opportunities to people to lead a healthy and fulfilling life.
2. Yes, the popular entertainment channels and films generally depict gender discrimination. In fact, the serials on television channels are reinforcing the prevailing patriarchal system showing females playing traditional roles of mothers, sisters, wives and daughters. It is true that a few of them question the traditional roles, but those also somehow reflect gender discrimination.
3. Caste System: The most detrimental and inhuman example of the prevailing caste system is the practice of untouchability which is continuing in different covert and overt ways in spite of the constitutional ban imposed on it. The Dalits still bear the brunt of discrimination and deprivation. This has led to segregation of so called low castes, depriving them of education and other social benefits. The second example relates to politicization of caste system. Casteism has become notorious as a strategy of exploitation of caste consciousness for narrow political gains. The caste system acts against the roots of democracy. Communalism: It disrupts quite often the smooth process of co-existence in a multi-religious Indian society. Communal riots happening in the country since independence have been dangerous for peace order and social harmony. Secondly the misuse of religion by fundamentalist people during elections and even in other situations has always been proved to be counter-productive.
4. Although development process in the country aims at growth and development of all regions, the regional disparities and imbalances continue to exist. Existence and continuation of regional inequalities in terms of differences in per capita income, literacy rates, state of health and educational infrastructure and services, population situation and levels of industrial and agricultural development both among States and within a State create a feeling of neglect, deprivation and discrimination.
5. The influence of muscle power in Indian politics has been a fact of life for a long time. Political parties and candidates do not hesitate in seeking the help of criminal elements to dominate the election scene in India. Earlier in the 1960's, the criminals were content by covertly helping the politician win the election so that they could in turn get protection from him. But the


Notes

MODULE - 4

Contemporary India: Issues
and Goals



Notes

Challenges to Indian Democracy

roles have now been reversed. It is the politicians who now bank on the support of the criminals for protection.

6. One of the major reasons of increase of political violence has been the emergence of serious conflict of interests between higher and middle castes as an outcome of agricultural development, abolition of *zamindari system*, and developments like green revolution and white revolution. These have led to aggressive competition for political power which many a time leads to violence. Another reason is the backlash of the higher castes against the growing awareness and assertion of their rights by the lower castes, particularly the Scheduled Castes and the lowest backward castes. Moreover, violence has been associated with demands for separate States, re-organization of States or adjustment of State boundaries. As we observe, the Telangana Movement in Andhra Pradesh and Bodo Movement in Assam often turned violent. Violence has also been used quite frequently during industrial strikes, farmers' movements, students' agitations, and a number of other civil disobedience campaigns.

23.3

1. To attain the goal of universal literacy a nation-wide programme known as *Saakshar Bharat* is being implemented. Moreover, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is a flagship programme for the universalization of elementary education for children between 6-14 years of age. Besides, the Parliament of India in 2009 passed *Right to Education Act* through which education has become a fundamental right of all children in the age group of 6-14 years. For poverty alleviation, two kinds of programmes are being implemented: (i) Programmes to lift beneficiaries above poverty line by providing them with productive assets or skills or both so that they can employ themselves usefully and earn greater income, and (ii) Programmes to provide temporary wage employment for the poor and the landless. Public Distribution System (PDS) contributes towards meeting people's basic food needs, the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) provides rural households below the poverty line with credit to purchase income-generating assets, the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), provides more than 700 million person days of work a year. Moreover, TRYSEM (Training Rural Youth for Self Employment) was started to provide technical skills to the rural youth and to help them to get employment.
2. Besides the State-specific efforts for reducing intra-State regional disparities, a number of Centrally Sponsored Programmes have been in operation for the last two to three decades for taking care of specific aspects of backwardness of such regions. Some of the major programmes are: (i) the Tribal Development Programme, (ii) the Hill Area Development Programme, (iii) the Border Area Development Programme, (iv) the Western Ghats Development Programme, (v) the Drought Prone Area Programme, and (vi) the Desert Development Programme.



Notes

3. For administrative reforms, the following recommendations need to be implemented: (i) to make administration accountable and citizen friendly, (ii) to build its capacity for quality governance, (iii) to orient administration for promoting peoples' participation, decentralization and devolution of powers, (iv) to make administrative decision-making process transparent, (v) to improve the performance and integrity of the public services, (vi) to reinforce ethics in administration, and (vii) to inculcate readiness for e-governance.

For judicial reforms, the steps that are to be taken are as follows: (a) Simplification of Rules and Procedures, (b) Repealing Out-dated Laws, (c) Increase in the Judge Population Ratio, (d) Time-bound filling of Vacant Posts in Judiciary, (d) Transparency in Appointment, Promotion and Transfer of Judges, (e) Judicial Accountability, and (f) Transparency of Court Proceedings.

4. Sustainable development is a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for the future generations. When the development is human-centred and directed towards improvement of quality of life of all the people, it has to be focused on removal of poverty, ignorance, discrimination, disease and unemployment. All these steps will strengthen Indian democracy.

23.4

- Participation in a democratic polity is not confined simply to participation in elections. A vital form of participation comes through membership of political parties and more importantly, active membership in independent non-governmental organizations, that are known as "civil society organizations." Civil Society Organizations represent a variety of interests of different groups: women, students, farmers, workers, doctors, teachers, business owners, religious believers and human rights activists.
- Citizens have to make the democratic system responsive and responsible. They are needed to ensure that the Parliamentarians, Members of State Legislatures and their representatives in Panchayati Raj and Municipal Institutions are accountable. The instruments created by Right to Information Act, 2005 in our country enable citizens to play their role effectively. Citizens must watch carefully how their political leaders and representatives use their powers, and to express their own opinions and interests.
- Fill in the Blanks: (a) responsibility, rights; (b) law, violence; (c) culture, control; (d) opinion, views.