

Revision Notes
CHAPTER - 8
Challenges to Democracy

Overview

- 1.This concluding chapter draws upon all that you have learnt in the last two years so as to address the fundamental questions of democratic politics.
- 2.This chapter does not answer these questions.
- 3.It only makes some suggestions about the way in which we can approach the questions of challenges and reforms.
- 4.It invites you to think on your own and come up with your own reading of the challenges, your recipe of how to overcome these and your own definition of democracy.

Thinking about challenges:

- 1.Democracy is the dominant form of government in the contemporary world. It does not face a serious challenge or rival.
- 2.The promise of democracy is far realized anywhere in the world.
- 3.Democracy does not have a challenger, but that does not mean that it does not face any challenges.
- 4.A challenge is not just any problem. We usually call only those difficulties a 'challenge' which is significant and which can be overcome.
- 5.A challenge is a difficulty that carries within it an opportunity for progress.
- 6.The first challenge is a foundational challenge, of making the transition to democracy and then instituting democratic government.
- 7.The second challenge is the challenge of expansion. This involves applying the basic principle of democratic government across all the regions, different social groups and various institutions.
- 8.The third challenge is of deepening of democracy is faced by every democracy in one form or another. This involves the strengthening of the institutions and practices of democracy.

Thinking about political reforms:

1. Generally, all the suggestions or proposals about overcoming various challenges to democracy are called 'democratic reform' or 'political reform'.
2. If all the countries do not have the same challenges, it follows that everyone cannot follow the same recipe of political reforms.
3. We can develop some proposals for reforms at the national level.
4. But the real challenge of reforms may not lie at the national level.
5. Instead of that let us think of some broad guidelines that can be kept in mind while devising ways and means for political reforms in India:
 - I) It is very tempting to think of legal ways of reforming politics, to think of new laws to ban undesirable things. But this temptation needs to be resisted.
 - II) Any legal change must carefully look at what results it will have on politics. Sometimes the results may be counter-productive.
 - 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.
 - IV) Any proposal for political reforms should think not only about what is the good solution but also about who will implement it and how.
6. Let us keep these general guidelines in mind and look at some specific instances of challenges to democracy that require some measure of reform.

Redefining democracy:

1. We began this tour of democracy last year with a minimal definition of democracy.
2. We then looked at many cases and expanded the definition slightly to add some definitions:
 - I) The rulers 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 rules of the Constitution and citizens' right.
3. You may have felt disappointed that the definition did not refer to any high ideals that we associate with democracy.
4. You may have noticed that in the course of our discussions of various aspects of democratic government and politics, we have gone beyond that definition:

I)We discussed democratic rights at length and noted that these rights are not limited to the rights to vote, stand in elections and form political organizations.

II)We have taken up power sharing as the spirit of democracy and discussed how power sharing between governments and social groups is necessary for a democracy.

III)We saw how democracy cannot be the brute rule of the 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.

V)Finally, we have had some discussion about some outcomes that one can expect from democracy.

5.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 a country must have to be called a democracy.