

Challenges to Indian democracy -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.

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 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.