

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.

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 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.