CHALLENGES TO INDIAN DEMOCRACY

India is the largest democracy in the world. You may be aware of this statement. Can you recollect where you have read or heard it recently? There are many countries in the world that have democratic systems. Do you think that India is known as a democracy because of elections taking place here at regular intervals? We have been witnessing elections being held in the country at different levels for over six decades. Municipal and Panchayat elections also do take place. But, can a country be called a democracy only on the basis of the fact that elections are organized regularly? Think over it, because we know that there are some countries where elections do take place, but those are not democracies in true sense. Then the question is what does democracy actually mean? What are the factors which makes a country democratic? We quite often feel that we as a democratic nation are not satisfied with the present state of affairs. We are confronting a number of challenges. There are many critical problems that need to be solved, so that India marches ahead as a progressive democratic country. The present lesson discusses all these issues and focuses especially on the challenges that our country has been facing.

OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning of democracy in varied contexts (political, social, individual or self) and indicate the essential conditions of democracy;
- identify major challenges to Indian democracy and appreciate those as potential opportunities to make it successful;
- recognise the corrective measures for improving the Indian democratic system and assess the efforts; and
- identify the roles of citizens in a democracy based on experiences of life.
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.

23.1.1 Meaning of Democracy

When we are asked to define democracy, we generally quote a very popular definition: “Democracy is a government of the people, for the people, by the people.” Do you know who had said this? 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?
Whenever we define democracy, we begin by quoting its meaning in ancient Greece. We state that 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 means “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.

In some democracies known as direct democracies, the public participates in government directly. Such governments were there in some of the ancient Greek city-states.

But most of the democracies today are representative democracies, though they differ from one another in details. In all of them legislatures are constituted by the elected representatives of the people. The House of Lords in the United Kingdom is a notable exception, as it consists of nominated members. The offices in the Executive are also filled by peoples’ representatives. The Presidents, the Prime Ministers and Ministers in the Council of Ministers or Cabinets are elected. But there are some countries that have constitutional monarchies, like the United Kingdom, and in those the Heads of the State are hereditary. India is a representative democracy. As you have studied in previous lessons, in India the Legislatures and Executives in the Centre and the States have elected representatives of the people.

However, if you try to understand a wider meaning of democracy in the present age and time, 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 behavior.

**ACTIVITY 23.2**

Sunil, who is doing his M.A lives in an extended family. His grandfather has fixed the marriage of one of his sisters who is 15 years old. The groom is 19 years old and is studying in class XII. Neither Sunil nor his parents who are officers in the
State government are in favour of this decision. But no one is able to assert their opinion, nor does his grandfather consult them. Do you think there is democracy in Sunil’s family? Which of the following statements do you consider are relevant and which are not relevant and why?

1. The decision in respect of the marriage of his sister at the age of 15 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 and 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

In view of the above, a system can be termed as a genuine and comprehensive democracy only when it fulfills certain conditions. Let us identify those. There may be two major categories: (a) political conditions, and (b) social and economic conditions.

Obviously, the first and the foremost is political conditions. 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 Judiciary must be 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. 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. 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 the poor and deprived sections of the society.

**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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Present/Absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equal pay for equal work</td>
<td>Socio-economic</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 23.1**

1. What do you mean by democracy in political context?
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 political, socio-economic conditions of democracy?

**23.2 CHALLENGES TO INDIAN DEMOCRACY**

If you examine the Indian system based on the above discussion, you will find that it articulates many of the essential features of democracy. Its Constitution, the largest in the world, has been effectively functional and been able to adapt itself to the changing situations. Free and fair periodic elections for all political offices, legislative and executive, have been taking place regularly for more than six decades. *The Economist* gave India the second-highest score for the fairness, transparency and openness of its electoral process in its 2008 Democracy Index, an annual ranking of the state of democracy in the world. 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.

Moreover, the legislative, executive and judicial organs have been functioning and in spite of some negative experiences judiciary has been found to be independent. The Parliament or the State Legislatures have control over the Executive, especially the Council of Ministers. And more importantly, some significant enactments like Right To Information (RTI) Act 2005, have empowered people to make governments accountable to them. The Press including electronic media has autonomy and play a key role in influencing public opinion. The nation is moving ahead on course to economic development and also significant social change and development are taking place.

But as you also might have experienced, the country is also facing many problems. Some of these problems are considered as challenges because of their difficulty level and seriousness. There are certain challenges, for example economic recession or environmental degradation or threat to peace, which are global in nature. But there are challenges that are specific to Indian democracy. After independence, India immediately adopted a system which reflected all the principles of developed democratic systems, but its social system remained by and large traditional. The level of economic development was also at its lowest ebb. This gap is often described as the mismatch between political democracy and socio-economic democracy which has led to a number of challenges. Some of these challenges at times also indicate possible threats to Indian democracy. Let us discuss the following major challenges and appreciate as potential opportunities for improving the functioning of democracy.

23.2.1 Illiteracy

Illiteracy among people was a matter of grave concern for 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 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, 8.9 percent. It was, therefore, feared by many that the citizens will not be able to play their roles effectively and exercise meaningfully their right to vote 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. The Indian National Congress under the leadership of Ms. Indira Gandhi was very popular and powerful
Challenges to Indian Democracy

during early part of 1970s. But in 1977’s general election, the people of India rejected them primarily because of the misuse of power during emergency in 1975-1977 and gave an opportunity to Janata Party to form government at the Centre. Again the Rajiv Gandhi led Congress government that came to power in 1984 with thumping majority was voted out by the people in 1989. This has been happening in States also.

Figure 23.2 If I also could study!

Literacy is necessary not simply for enabling citizens to participate in elections and exercise their right to vote effectively. It has other more important implications. 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. 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 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 still illiterate.

23.2.2 Poverty

Don’t you think that poverty is perhaps the greatest bane of democracy? You will agree that it is 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 problem. Even now a considerable proportion of Indian population lives below poverty line. 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 which measures the extent of poverty is based on the amount of income required to purchase a barest 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.

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 underemployment. 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 also regarded as a reason, though population is considered as the greatest resource. 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 be a great challenge to Indian democracy.

23.2.3 Gender Discrimination

We observe the discrimination against females, girls and women in every walk of life. You also must have had such experiences of lack of gender equality 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.

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 still 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 foeticide. 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**

Sona Khatun belongs to Assam and is one of the increasing number of brides getting married in Haryana. Haryana owing to preference for boy babies has had a sex ratio unfavourable to women. The Red Cross Society of India, which campaigns
against the female infanticide and foeticide in the country, reports that at least 100 brides have been brought into Bhiwani, one of Haryana’s 21 districts.

Adapted From 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 employment and their representation in public life. No doubt, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments 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 (for 33% of reservation of women in Parliament) has not yet been passed despite a very low ratio of women in both the Houses of the Parliament.

The 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 have given it a priority.

Do you know

The Bihar Panchayat Amendment Bill, 2006, whereby Bihar 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 boasts 2 lakh women panchayat members.

23.2.4 Casteism, Communalism and Religious Fundamentalism

(a) Casteism: The challenges of casteism, communalism and religious fundamentalism are major threats to Indian polity. They weaken the functioning and stability of democratic system. 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 not experienced the role of casteism in your own life and in your 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
Challenges to Indian Democracy

segregation of so-called low castes or ‘Dalits’, depriving them of education and other social benefits. The Dalit castes 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.

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

(b) Communalism and Religious Fundamentalism: 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 set back 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. But adherence to a religion or attachment to a religious community is not communalism.

Although conservatism represents social backwardness, it also does not mean communalism. As a matter of fact, communalism is an ideology of political allegiance to a religious community as a primary group and its base. It uses one religious community against other communities and perceives other religious communities as its enemies. It is opposed to secularism and even humanism.
Religious fundamentalism reinforces communalists in exploiting both religion and politics. In recent past also communalism has proved to be a grave threat to our social and political life on several occasions. Can you recollect some communal incidents that occurred in the recent past?

### 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 here in certain territorial segments. Although development process in the country has been aimed 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 been giving rise to regionalism manifested in demands for creation of new States, autonomy or more powers to States or even separation 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 politicised 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 been giving 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 2010, India was ranked 87th of 178 countries in Transparency International’s *Corruption Perceptions Index* (CPI). It is worse than its rank of 84 in 2009. 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 is present in the judicial system of India as well. According to Transparency International, the main reasons for judicial corruption in India are (i) delays in the disposal of cases, (ii) shortage of judges and complex procedures, all of which are exacerbated by a preponderance of new laws.
Above all, corruption in electoral processes and bribing of voters who participate in elections at different levels have now become common experiences. 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. It is a matter of grave concern for Indian democracy. In fact, corruption is a sign of political instability and institutional decay, challenging in the most serious manner the validity and propriety of governance.

23.2.7 Criminalisation of Politics

Criminalisation of politics in India has become an issue of grave concern. And though the top leaders of all political parties agree that those with criminal record should be debarred from contesting elections, the number of such people continues to increase. In 2004, about one in five MPs had a criminal record, including some with charges of heinous crimes such as murder, robbery, kidnapping, human trafficking, immigration rackets, embezzlement, rape and not just violation of Section 144, or something similar. It is alleged quite often that almost all parties take the help of criminal elements to dominate the election scene in India.

The influence of muscle power in Indian politics has been a fact of life for a long time. Earlier in the 1960’s, the criminal was content by covertly helping the politician win the election so that he could in turn get protection from him. But the roles have now been reversed. It is the politician who seeks protection from criminals now. The criminals seek direct access to power and hence become legislators or ministers. A new dimension has been added to the process by the criminalisation of bureaucracy and the police. What makes the situation particularly dangerous is that a criminalised administration poses a serious threat to the country’s security.
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.

Another aspect of caste violence is the higher castes backlash against the growing awareness and assertion of their rights by the Dalits and lower castes, particularly the Scheduled Castes and 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’ movement 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 that you might have seen recently, depict gender discrimination? Justify with examples.
3. Describe two examples on how do casteism or communalism impact our day-to-day lives and impact 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 in political violence in India?

23.3 CORRECTIVE MEASURES

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that Indian democracy and society are facing certain serious challenges. You will definitely agree that there is a need to take corrective measures to offset the impact of these negative developments. It is not that we were completely unaware of these problems on the eve of independence. In fact, the leadership of the freedom movement and especially the framers of the Indian Constitution were very much concerned with these issues. They made a number of constitutional provisions to take care of these concerns. Various governments also have been taking measures to respond to many of these. But there is a lot to be done. The government, the political parties and other political and social organizations and above all the citizens must play their respective roles in the fight against these challenges. Certain significant corrective measures 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 age fourteen is a 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. 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 above-15 age group, to enable them to continue their learning beyond basic literacy and acquire equivalence to formal
In 1999, Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) was conceived as a holistic programme of micro enterprise development in rural areas with emphasis on organising the rural poor into self-help groups, 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 organisation (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 Government schemes, camps and campaigns. They attend gram sabha meetings and have made representations for provision of basic facilities in their village and overall development of the area.

For example, 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 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 EAS was designed to provide employment in the form of manual work in the lean agricultural season. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) 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 recognised that the goals of democracy “of the people, for the people and by the people” cannot be fully fulfilled 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 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.

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;

(v) elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child;

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) Desert Development Programme.

For the development of North East states, a certain percentage is earmarked for the North East, from the budget for each developmental scheme or programme. While the development of depressed regions is a national responsibility, the solution mainly rests with the local leadership. Unless the local leadership – political, bureaucratic and intellectual – resolve to usher in development based on sharing the gains on egalitarian basis with the masses, results will be hard to come by. Resources are not the real constraint. It is the way resources are spent.

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 demonstrated its independence on many occasions, but there are serious problems, the most critical of them being (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 been a continuous agenda ever since independence and a number of Commissions and Committees have been set up. 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.
Challenges to Indian Democracy

23.3.6 Sustainable Development (Economic, Social, Environmental)

The 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 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 Bruntland 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.”

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 23.3**

1. What are the measures being undertaken in India 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 imbalance in India?
3. How can the administrative and judicial reforms be realized in India?
4. What is sustainable development? How will it strengthen Indian democracy?

23.4 ROLE OF CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRACY

As citizens of India, do we really appreciate the role of a citizen in a democracy and why is this role so important? Generally, it is believed that the government rules over people who have to respect the 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 behavior 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 Citizen’s Role

The opportunities to play the role as a democratic citizen 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. But 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. But 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 function at different levels, national, state and local. And hence, every citizen has to play a critical role and use every opportunity for doing so. Are we Indian citizens doing so? 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 make his or her own decision on whom to vote for. But as is made public by the Election Commission of India after every election, on an average almost 50 per cent citizens do not vote. Definitely very few are involved in campaigning for a political party or candidate or in debates on public issues.

Participation in a democratic polity, however, 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.” 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 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 Right to Information Act, 2005 in our country enable citizens to play their role effectively. Citizens have an obligation to become informed 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 the government is not living up to its promises, they can point it out through media, make recommendations and demands to 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 the aims 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

If democracy is to work, citizens must not only participate and exercise their rights. In fact, the corrective measures to meet the challenges faced by Indian democracy, as discussed above, can be actualized only when citizens play a proactive role. They 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 they have 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 they want. 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 consider improper. You have seen in Activity 23.2, how members of Sunil’s family did not assert their opinion against the decision of the head of the family.
ACTIVITY 23.5

Now that you have tried to understand the kind of 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.

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

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 practise 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.
Challenges to Indian Democracy

WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- Democracy is a form of government in which supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodic free elections. But 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.

- Indian Democracy over the years has been able to articulate many of these essential conditions. But 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 major challenges that need to be addressed.

- The corrective measures that are needed to meet the challenges to Indian democracy are focused 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 and fulfilling obligations and playing proactive roles to actualise the goals of democracy.

TERMINAL EXERCISES

1. Explain the meaning of democracy. Why do you think that the meaning of democracy cannot be comprehensive, if it is defined only in political context?

2. What are the essential conditions that make a system truly democratic?

3. What are the major challenges to Indian democracy? Explain how the challenges are potential opportunities to make it an effective democratic system.
4. Critically examine the trends of protest and violence in India. Why do protests turn into violent movements?

5. What are the significant corrective measures that are required to be taken 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 INTTEXT QUESTIONS

23.1

1. 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. 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 environment and individual behavior.

3. A system can be termed as a genuine democracy only when it fulfills (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 patterns of family relations showing females playing traditional roles of mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, mothers-in-laws and daughters-in-laws. 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 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 politicisation 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 and order. 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 has been aimed 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. Almost all parties take the help of criminal elements to dominate the election scene in India. Earlier in the 1960’s, the criminal was content by covertly helping the politician win the election so that he could in turn get protection from him.
But the roles have now been reversed. It is the politician who seeks protection from criminals.

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 higher castes against the growing awareness and assertion of their rights by the lower castes, particularly the Scheduled Castes and lowest backward castes. Moreover, violence has been associated with demands for separate States, reorganization of States or adjustment of State boundaries. As we observe, the Telangana Movement in Andhra Pradesh often turns violent. Violence has also been used quite frequently during industrial strikes, farmers’ movement, 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 universalisation of elementary education for children between 6-14 years of age. Besides, Parliament of India in 2009 passed Right to Education Act through which education has become a fundamental right of all children of age group 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 contributes towards meeting people’s basic food needs, the Integrated Rural Development Programme provides rural households below the poverty line with credit to purchase income-generating assets, The Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, 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 Ghat Development Programme, (v) the Drought Prone Area Programme and (vi) Desert Development Programme.
Challenges to Indian Democracy

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 future generations to come. 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 will strengthen Indian democracy.

23.4

1. 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.” These organizations represent a variety of interests of different groups: women, students, farmers, workers, doctors, teachers, business owners, religious believers and human rights activists.

2. 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.

3. Fill in the Blanks: (a) responsibility, rights; (b) law, violence; (c) culture, control; (d) opinion, views.