

Challenges to Democracy

Meaning of Challenge

A challenge is not just any problem. We usually call only those difficulties a 'challenge' which are significant and which can be overcome. A challenge is a difficulty that carries within it an opportunity for progress. Once we overcome a challenge we go up to a higher level than before.

Foundational Challenge

Different countries face different kinds of challenges. At least one fourth of the globe is still not under democratic government. The challenge for democracy in these parts of the world is very stark. These countries face the foundational challenge of making the transition to democracy and then instituting democratic government. This involves bringing down the existing non-democratic regime, keeping military away from controlling government and establishing a sovereign and functional state. For example, Nepal was under Monarchy till recent times. Now Nepal has changed to a democratic system. Certain mindsets and systems will take years to change as they have taken years to develop. Nepal is a very good example of foundational challenge of democracy.

Challenge of Expansion

Most of the established democracies face the challenge of expansion. This involves applying the basic principle of democratic government across all the regions, different social groups and various institutions. Ensuring greater power to local governments, extension of federal principle to all the units of the federation, inclusion of women and minority groups, etc., falls under this challenge. This also means that less and less decisions should remain outside the arena of democratic control. Most countries including India and other democracies like the US face this challenge. In India certain socio-economically backward groups have yet to get the political powers. Additionally, some north-eastern states have not yet fully integrated with the mainstream India. These are examples of challenge of expansion of democracy.

Deepening of Democracy

The third challenge of deepening of democracy is faced by every democracy in one form or another. This involves strengthening of the institutions and practices of democracy. This should happen in such a way that people can realise their expectations of democracy. But ordinary people have different expectations from democracy in different societies. In the early nineties, when T N Sheshan became the Chief Election Commissioner, he brought about a revolutionary change of disciplining political parties. This in turn ensured fairer elections. This is an example of strengthening a particular political institution.

From above descriptions it is clear that different countries face different kinds of challenges to democracy. These challenges depend on what stage of social development the country is. Solutions to these challenges also depend on a particular country's unique situation. It can be said that there is no pre-prescribed method to tackle the challenge faced by a democracy.