"Electoral Reforms in India – Issues and Concerns"

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Democracy becomes successful and meaningful through the medium of elections. Elections enable the people to express their views on the functioning of the government. In this regard it may be noted that elections must be held on free, fair and impartial basis. People cast their votes in a responsible way only when they are given political freedom.

India has the distinction of being the largest democracy of the world. Elections are the most important and integral part of politics in a democratic system of governance. While politics is the art and practice of dealing with political power, election is a process of legitimization of such power. Democracy can indeed function only upon this faith that elections are free and fair and not rigged and manipulated, that they are effective instruments of ascertaining popular will both in reality and in form and are not mere rituals calculated to generate illusion of difference to mass opinion, it cannot survive without free and fair elections. The election at present are not being hold in ideal conditions because of the enormous amount of money required to be spent and large muscle power needed for winning the elections. Over the years, Indian electoral system suffers from serious infirmities. The election process in our country is the progenitor of political corruption.

The term 'Electoral Reform' refers to the change in the systems of election process in order to improve on the desirability of the public in the election results. One of the prime factors in electoral reforms is the change in the process and procedure of voting System.
Electoral reforms are a must in India and to introduce these reforms, the younger generation and the middle-class need to be more sensitized hence making them more aware.

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To make the younger generation more aware about the electoral reforms it is necessary that the universities in the country produces more people who knows the art of playing with democracy.

There are 542 members in parliament since the 12th Lok Sabha elections, whereas during this period the population of the country has increased manifold and to add to that the voting age has been brought down to18 years.

To look at it in another way we will find that **one Member of Parliament (MP) represents 1.2 million people** which is something very unfortunate and needs to be changed immediately.

Talking about the Indian Constitution it can be said that the Constitution has maintained its dignity of democracy for the last 65 years even when a developed country like United States failed.

Although the Indian constitution has had a success story for the last 65 years yet it is reaching the crossroads.

The ideal conditions require that an honest, and upright person who is public spirited and wants to serve the people, should be able to contest and get elected as people‟s representatives. But in actual fact, such a person as aforesaid has no chance of either contesting or in any case winning the election.

ISSUES AND CAUSES

The election at present are not being hold in ideal conditions because of the enormous amount of money required to be spent and large muscle power needed for winning the elections. The major defects which come in the path of electoral system in India are: money power, muscle power, criminalisation of politics, poll violence, booth capturing, communalism, castism, non-serious and independent candidates etc.

Money Power: Electioneering is an expensive affair in every democratic polity which plays a more vital role in India. Money power plays in our electoral system destructive role affecting seriously the working of periodic elections, It leads to all round corruption and contributes mainly to the generation of black money economy which rules at present our country? A prospective candidate in each constituency has to spend millions of money towards transport, publicity and other essential items of election campaign. In recent years the election expenses have increased beyond any limits due to the desire on the part of every political party to spend more than their rivals in the fray. The elections in Indian polity are becoming increasingly expensive and the gap between the expenses

incurred and legally permitted is increasing over the years. The observers are watching the system that requires unbelievably enormous expenditure collected through the dubious means by political parties and their candidates. This seems to be continued even today with more disastrous consequences of an overflow of black money into the corridors of political parties despite the liberalized economy induced to the political system of country. Elections in India so far from a common man, only those people can participate in elections as a candidate who has a lot of money, because today vote is not a mean of public opinion. It is being purchased.

Muscle Power: Violence, pre-election intimidation, post election , victimisation, most of the riggings of any type, booth capturing both silent and violent are mainly the products of muscle power. These are prevalent in many parts of the country like Bihar, Western Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra etc. and this cancerous disease is slowly spreading to south like in Andhra Pradesh, Criminalisation of politics and politicalisation of criminals, freely indulged in now, are like two sides of the same coin and are mainly responsible for the

manifestation of muscle power at elections.[4] By using of violence, the criminals are able to achieve success at elections for their benefactors.

Misuse of Government Machinery: It is generally complained that the government in power at the time of election misuse official machinery to further the election prospects of its party candidates. The misuse of official machinery takes different forms, such as issue of advertisements at the cost of government and public exchequer highlighting their achievements, disbursements out of the discretionary funds at the disposal of the ministers, use of government vehicles for canvassing etc. The misuse of official machinery in the ways mentioned above gives an unfair advantage to the ruling party at the time of elections.

Criminalisation of Politics: During the election period, newspapers are usually full of information about the number of criminals in the field sponsored by every party. The reason of the criminals behind entrance to politics is to gain influence and ensure that cases against them are dropped or not proceeded with. They are able to make it big in the political arena because of their financial clout. Political parties tap criminals for fund

and in return provide them with political patronage and protection. Mafia dons and other powerful gangsters have shown that they can convert their muscle power into votes often at gun point. Voters in many parts in the country are forced to vote for the local strongman. Tickets were given to the candidates with criminal records even by National Party. All these instances reported time and again show that democracy in India has largely failed to be what it was meant to be because the electoral system has been perverted.

Non-Serious Candidates in Political Parties: In recent years there has been a steady increase in the number of candidates in elections. The number of candidates has swelled due to the participation of Independents. They contest elections light heartedly and lose their deposits. Non-serious candidates are largely floated by serious candidates either to cut sizeable portion of votes of rival candidates or to split the votes on

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caste lines or to have additional physical force at polling station and counting centers. The multiplicity of candidates causes inconvenience to election authorities in the management of elections. The voters are also handicapped in identifying the candidates of their own choice.

There has been a great deal of political instability during the last decades. The result has been unstable administration and unstable policies, the hallmark of minority governments. The reasons are not far to seek. The Westminster Model adopted by us, works mainly on the basis of a limited number of political parties. In the United Kingdom, there are only two major political parties. Contrarily in India, politicisation at ground level coupled with a highly fragmented society, has given rise to a multiplicity of political parties. Each one of these exists not on a different ideology or economic programme, but on the basis of having nursed a narrow parochial, mostly caste or religion based, identity for itself and its band of followers.
The resultant divided vote has made it increasingly difficult for single parties to get a workable majority to form a government at the centre,

In order to cobble up a workable majority to form governments, compromises have had to be made and all ideology or notions of quality of governance have disappeared from the scene. This has had a very negative repercussion on the quality of governance with several consequences. The common citizen has been

the victim of all resultant misgovernance

Castism : Although there is hardly any instance in India of a political party being totally identified with any particular caste group, yet there are cases of certain castes lending strong support to particular political parties. Thus while political parties struggle among themselves, to win different caste groups in their favour by making offers to them, caste groups too try to pressurize parties to choose its members for candidature in elections, If the caste group is dominant and the political party ,is an important one, this interaction is all the

more prominent. In many political parties, in place of ideological polarization there occur the determination of policies and programmes as well as the nomination of electoral candidates and the extension of support to

them on caste consideration. Caste dominates the political field, especially at the lower level. Ultimately caste becomes the deciding factor on selection. Caste based politics and castism are eroding the „unity‟ principle in the name of regional autonomy.

Communalism: The emergence of India as a „secular‟ state, the politics of communalism and religious fundamentalism in the post independence period has led to a number of separate movements in various states and regions of the country. Communal polarization, rather multi-polarization, has posed a threat to the Indian

„political ethos of pluralism, parliamentarianism and federalism. Despite the adoption of the „principle of „Secularism‟ as a constitutional creed, which ironically allows communal parties to compete, the trend towards communalism and fundamentalism in Indian politics have been growing day by day. The spirit of tolerance that is essential for a „secular‟ society seems to have completely vanished from the body politics of India.

Caste and religion have in recent years emerged "as rallying points to gain electoral" support.

Unfortunately there is a tendency to play upon caste and religious sentiments and field candidates in elections with an eagle eye on the caste equations and communal configurations.

Lack of Moral Values in Politics: There has been very sharp erosion in the ideological orientation of political parties. Party dynamics in India has led to the emergence of valueless politics much against the ideals of the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, who suggested that the Congress party should be disbanded after the achievement of Independence and its members should engage themselves in the service of the people. While Gandhi taught us tremendous selflessness, self sacrifice and service, to the people, such inspirational values, the democratic norms and institutions have been destroyed systematically over the last years of the working of the Constitution. In the process, both the politicians and political parties have lost their credibility, the ultimate value that should bind them with the masses. There seems to be a crisis of character amongst the politicians, as the system does not encourage the honest leader. Because of the falling moral standards both in the public and among the leaders.Due todegeneration of leadership, parties have been entangled in power struggle for the sake of personal ends. In a moral pursuit of power polities, every major player seems to be playing a no holds barred game. The Gandhian value of the spirit of service to the nation has become completely extinct from the present day politics.

The whole country is now expressing serious concern over the anti-social and criminal elements entering into the electoral arena. An indomitable Mr. T.N. Seshan tried his best to cleanse the system, but he failed Mr.

Seshan"s successor, Mr. Gill faced the same problem. The Ex-CEC, Mr. Lingdoh also found himself in such a pitiable position, that he has found no suitable remedy to malpractices in elections. This leads to cleans the system but, to appeal the voters not to vote for the criminals. Mr. T.S. Krlshnamurthy, N. Gopalaswami and Navin B. Chawala the CECs also faced the same problem. CEC, T. S. Krishnamurthy has in a proposal letter

suggested to PM Manmohan Singh a set of poll reforms[15] that anyone charge sheeted at least six months before elections should be barred from contesting elections.

The EC has taken several new initiatives in the recent past as a use of state owned Electronic Media for broadcast or telecast by political parties, checking : criminalisation of polities, providing with electoral identify cars, streamlining the procedure for registration of political parties and requiring them to hold regular organizational elections, a variety of measures of strict compliance of Model Code of Conduct for providing a

level playing field to contestants during the elections, and so on.[16] In India, the BC has established a set of guidelines known as the Model Code of Conduct that must be obeyed by political parties and candidates in the run-up to an election. These guidelines are intended to ensure that the ruling party at both the national and state levels - does not misuse its official position to gain an unfair advantage in an election.

SUGGESTIONS

To my mind, I suggest following issues that are to be brought in the election commission purview for making electoral system free and fair manner:

In order to effectively implement the electoral reforms and make it functional there are certain changes that have to be implemented by the Election Commission.
The first thing is the amount of **money and muscle power**that is involved in elections has to be very closely monitored and stern steps should be taken against people involving in the malicious use of money and muscle power.

Secondly the people of a constituency should be accorded the **power to recall**. In order to avoid illegal use of money in promoting one's candidature and party for election, annual audit of the representatives from various parties should be regularly conducted.

There should be a **close monitoring on people's participation**. In this age of technological advancement effective use and role of technology is very important.

The beginning of electoral reforms should be first of all implemented at the **student's union** level because it is the nursery of political parties where various students' unions follow various political parties and is also supported by the political parties in various ways.

Stipulation of above 51% of total votes polled for securing victory by the candidates in elections.

Introduction of negative voting system is imperative.

Banning charge sheeted criminals and those involved in scams from contesting elections.

Imposing ban on those small parties and splinter groups which cause political instability.

Only two or three chances for contesting the elections.

Age limit for contesting candidates in elections like retirement of government servents.

Contesting candidates should have minimum educational qualifications.

A candidate should contest from only one constituency instead of two or more constituencies.

Election commissioners must be strong minded persons in implementing the electoral principles.

There should be transparency in administration for conducting elections. The returning and presiding officers must work sincerely and honestly according to the guidelines of election commission.

Efficient Electoral Commission is a requirement of the day to conduct free and fair elections. Democracy and fearless elections cannot exist without each other. To stop unfair practices in elections like rigging by using official machinery and to ensure existence of democracy, following methods or means should be adopted.

The CEC should not be at the mercy to Executive and Parliament for its requirements. He should have separate and independent election department to enhance its objectivity and impartiality.

Political corruption should be stopped by providing funds to genuine candidates through political parties whose account should be auditable. Candidate involving in corruption should be disqualified.

Mass Media should play a non-partisan role in election and as a safeguard of democracy.

Periodic elections are the foundation of a democratic system. For fair electoral system every aspiring candidate must have fettered freedom to offer himself as a candidate for election and to conduct his election campaign in his own way so long as he keeps him within the law.

Every voter must be perfectly free to vote as Eve likes without any fear of consequences and without being unduly influenced by anyone by improper means and inducement or pressure of any kind.

Unearth and confiscate black money, which is widely used for buying votes. Make politicians as well as voters law abiding.

Strictly apply the Code of Conduct and punish those who violate it.

Revise voters" lists in time to avoid bogus polling and correct mistakes in the lists.

Prompt action by the judiciary, if any kind of violation is detected during elections.

CONCLUSION:

In democracy the public is most powerful entity. If the public do not vote in favour of criminals, dishonest and corrupt politicians who wish to purchase their votes by money or muscle powers, everything shall function nicely and the democracy will shine in the dark spectrum of hitherto corrupt and criminalised political system. So, though the EC is working hard in this direction, but it cannot succeed unless all political parties and voters realize their responsibility. Finally there should proper mechanism, fully functional and fully equipped to fight with any triviality. If the above suggestions were adopted, the electoral system in India would definitely become clean and efficient. Genuine and worthy candidates also play a vital role in making the electoral process effective and efficient

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