

## **An Examination of Elections and Indian Democracy**

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### ***Abstract***

This paper is a modest attempt to analyze the electoral process and importance of elections in democracy in general and in Indian democracy in particular. It also highlights the drawbacks in Indian electoral system and demand for electoral reforms in India. Both primary and secondary sources have been used in this paper. Historical and analytical methods have been used in this paper. This paper is divided into four parts. First part relates with the conceptual clarification and development of democratic process. Second part deals with the importance and significance of elections in Indian democracy. Third part analyses the elections as a tool for the safety of fundamental freedoms of the citizens. Last part relates with the defects in Indian electoral system and suggestions for electoral reforms.

**Keywords-** Democracy, History, Indian Elections

### **INTRODUCTION**

Earlier studies on elections and democracy were descriptive but now there have been changed in their nature. There are some fundamental questions. These are partly theoretical, partly methodological and partly conceptual. It is not only important to know who voted for whom; rather the aim is to find out why did the voters voted the way they voted. Besides, political scientists have not been able to propound a unanimously accepted theory of voting behavior. Many studies suffer from certain statistical fallacies. There are also problems of conceptual nature. The methodology used in this paper has a holistic dimension. It has taken view various aspects of Indian politics. Historical, comparative and analytical approach has been adopted. Both primary and secondary sources have been used in this study.

India is a democratic country. There is democratic set-up at the central and state levels in this country. Like the *Kumbh Mela* the elections have been taking place in India at the fixed intervals. Like the *Aradha Kumbhs* these have also been held at shorter intervals whenever the national or state legislature has been dissolved before the completion of their terms. The social scientists as well as analysts have all along viewed the elections as barometers of the health of the Indian democracy.

After three centuries of march of democracy in the West through such landmarks as the American and French Revolution, the British electoral reforms and the progressive era in the United States, civilization has finally grown to an extent at least to recognize that democracy is the essence of modern times. Even dictator's pay lip service to democracy and the

communist countries calls themselves “People’s Democracies.” Democracy is government not only by consent, but also by individual and rational consent of a large number of citizens. It has also been called government by discussion or by persuasion, for these are the typical ways in which the consent of the governed is gained and reaffirmed. Democratic form of government is distinguished by institutions that facilitate the gathering of consent and offer choices. Devices and institutions have been developed in various western countries that help to accomplish this goal with varying degrees of success. Among the most important of these are free elections, the secret ballot, devices for the legislative control of the executive branch, and the judicial remedies against the arbitrary use of governmental power. Majority rule is a major principle of democracy. In every body politic, important decisions have to be constantly made at one or more levels. The people must choose among several sets of leaders and thereby among several policies. In a representative democracy, there are bodies of representative—legislatures, committees and collegial executive or regulative bodies. Majority rule envisages that the issues are to be resolved by voting in all decisions—making bodies from the electorate to the last committee.

Democracy does not recognize heredity as a means of selecting the rulers, the democratic devise for this purpose are elections. Elections are key to democracy by which people, who are sovereign; decide who shall run the polity within the framework of the constitution. Since democracy means rule of majority, free and fair elections become the keystone of the arch which holds the edifice of state structure to decide that majority. Elections are, therefore, perceived as the genuine instruments for the creation of popular government. These vest in the public with an opportunity of making a choice among the political alternatives. The perception of the voters is deemed to be crucial in deciding the electoral outcome. The elections invest the government with the consent of the people and ensure it orderly replacement.

The role of elections in the processes of interest articulation, interest aggregation, political socialization, political recruitment and political communication has been widely recognized by a large number of scholars. The political culture of a society is shaped by this mechanism to a great extent. They play an important role in the promotion and expression of public opinion. The processes of political participation and political mobilization are significantly influenced by the electoral process. Elections are a device to ensure responsive government. The accountability of rulers to the ruled is facilitated through them. The people are able to influence the process of policy—making by giving their verdict in favour of, or against various policies and programmes. Elections also provide legitimacy to the authority in a democratic system.

The electoral process, therefore, constitute the heart and soul of the democratic process. It is through it that popular will is expressed. There is no doubt about the fact that democratic system depends on the active and intelligent interest of the people in their national affairs and elections provide opportunity for them. It is during elections that the people come forcefully in the picture. The sovereignty of the people is institutionalized and realized through this instrument. These are also required for ascertaining the public opinion on various issues. No democracy strives for unanimity in the modern era. Dissent is valued and in the system of

government under which believe, that is “rule by consent,” both consent and dissent have to be adequately measured. Hence, the study of elections is of paramount significance as it provides a unique opportunity of studying political behavior, political culture and political process. Moreover, the study of elections provides an opportunity to study a political system in action, using various techniques and methods from survey research and participant observation studies to the analysis of aggregate data.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In fact, democracy cannot be imagined without elections. As has been stated by Abraham Lincoln, “Democracy is a government of the people, for the people and by the people,” It ceases to be such without elections. Elections are also an important device for political education of the masses. As J. L. Nehru rightly said, “Elections are the University for Political Education in democracy.” These create political consciousness among the people because all the political parties issue their manifestos on this occasion. They explain their policies and programme during the campaign for elections. The political parties also criticize each-other and make a critical analysis of the policies of each-other. The political leaders make speeches, political broadcasts and use the party machines as a medium of political education and propaganda during the electoral process. Elections expose the people to a wide variety of political information even in the backward areas. Each election adds to their political knowledge.

### **ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF THE ELECTION SYSTEM**

An assumption behind the exercise of elections is that, their outcome would produce responsible party government based on discipline majorities and serves as an important method for judging the legitimacy of a political system. Elections give an opportunity to the various social classes, professional groups, organized political parties to capture power and to attain some influence in the decision-making process. These are in a way a trial of strength among various social forces that compete for capturing power. If a government does not come to power on the basis of popular mandate, the people will not follow the laws willingly. Since only few people are sufficiently interested in politics or to discuss current affairs regularly, only periodic elections can make the rulers responsive. Elections are an effective control on political leaders, whether in power or in opposition. When the leaders know that they have to face an election within a given term of years, they will have to pay attention to public opinion. Elections may be considered as a device for legitimacy, identification, integration, communication and mobilization as well as for political choice and political control. They are an important link between the society and the polity. They convert inputs (demand and support) into outputs (policies and programme). In fact, we cannot imagine a democratic political system without elections.<sup>5</sup>

India is one of the largest democracies in the world. It has successfully sustained its parliamentary system because free and fair elections constitute an integral part of its political system. The constitution of India itself guarantees right to elect and to be elected to the citizens of the country. The mechanism of fair elections in India is ordained in the part xv of

the constitution of India and other laws relating to the elections are embodied in the representation of peoples acts of 1950 and 1951. Various provisions made in the Indian constitution and in the representation of the peoples Acts of 1950 and 1951 show how anxious the constitution-makers had been to safeguard this political right of the citizens as an integral part of the constitution itself. It is for this reason that the subject of elections has been accorded constitutional recognition in our country.<sup>6</sup>

The adoption of universal adult franchise for elections to the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabhas of the states in a vast country of India's size and population was perhaps the boldest and the most revolutionary step taken by the framers of Indian constitution. In a newly independent country with appalling backwardness, dismal poverty and rampant illiteracy, it was an act of faith on the part of the founding fathers to give a vote to every citizen who was not less than 21 years of age (since reduced to 18) and not otherwise disqualified under any law on grounds of non- residence, unsound mind, crime or corrupt or illegal practice (Art. 326). The right to vote is the most effective instrument in the hands of the Indian citizens to safeguard their fundamental freedoms and human rights and to realize and perform this obligation towards their fellow citizens and countrymen. The conferment of the right to vote on the largely illiterate, ignorant, backward, tradition-ridden poor masses unleashed many powerful forces, and new urges. It led to the politicization of many traditional, social, cultural and religious institutions and laid the seeds of change in the whole socio-political power-structure. The down- trodden dumb millions of India came to have a voice in determining their future and in forming the government for the first time in many centuries. The single electoral roll for each constituency for elections to Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha is a guarantee for equal participation of all citizens in the electoral process without any considerations of race, religion, sex etc. While the citizens can take pride in the fact that they have collectively exercised right to elect their representatives, the elected representatives can also be legitimately proud of the fact that they represent all their elector-citizens irrespective of their religion, caste, sex etc.

## **CONCLUSION**

Nevertheless, the working of the Indian model of the parliamentary democracy and its electoral system has brought to the limelight numerous distortions, pit falls, drawbacks and malpractices and ever since the voice for maintaining the purity and integrity of the electoral process has been consistently raised. A deep concern about the growing impact of factors like multiplicity of political parties, glaring economic and social inequalities, exploitation of caste and communal politics, negligence of rural voters, role of money and muscle power and that of the mafia gangs in elections, personality cult in party system, misuse of the governmental machinery etc. has been expressed. This has led to emergence of a demand for bringing about electoral reforms. The devaluation of standards and values in public life and the anxiety of somehow getting into power and staying there, by any means, like building vote banks on narrow sectarian lines, has pushed the interest of the nation and service to the people to the lowest priority, if any at all. In this scenario, a reiteration of the values and obligations of citizenship assumes special relevance and importance.

Various suggestions have been made for electoral reforms. The J.P. movement, launched in 1974, was the first campaign in this direction. It highlighted the drawbacks and defects of the Indian electoral system. It also brought into sharp focus the allegations of misuse of the official machinery and the roll of black money in the elections. Revolutionary steps were taken for electoral reforms by the former chief election commission Shri T. N. Sheshan. In fact, urgent steps are needed for reforming the electoral laws and processes. There are some suggestions for free and fair elections as (1) use of EVMs for every election, (2) to link the voting with *Adhaar* Card, (3) To take step for (compulsory) maximum voting, and (4) to start the online voting. But ultimately, the success of any reforms depends upon the participation of the honest, competent and committed citizens in the electoral process. It becomes the ardent duty of awakened and alert citizens to see that money and muscle power, violence and terror do not affect election results. They must also ensure that the parochial loyalties like those of religion, caste, language, region and the like are not allowed to be used to divide society, by vested interests for building power basis and vote banks. It is aptly said that the people get the government they deserve. Elections provide a unique opportunity to the people to elect a government which would be responsible to them and responsive to their needs and problems. Participation in the electoral process to elect the government is not merely a political right but a supreme duty and a constitutional responsibility of every citizen.

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