Issues and challenges - electoral reforms in India

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Abstract

India is the largest Democracy in the World but we feel that due to certain reasons, Democracy is not working properly. Multi-cornered contests have become a norm in India rather than an exception due to the increase in the number of smaller and regional parties. There have been cases in the state assembly elections where a candidate has been declared winner with the victory margin of less than 100 votes. Apart from this anomaly, in most cases, a candidate wins the election by securing just 30-35 per cent of the total number of votes polled. Hence he or she cannot be deemed to be a choice of majority of the electorate. To overcome this limitation, the first-past-the-post system should be replaced with a two-stage electoral process. In this, a second round of election will be held if none of the candidates in the fray is able to get 50 per cent of the total number of votes polled in the first round. The two candidates who have obtained the maximum number of votes in the first round will fight in the second round. Whoever between the two gets more than 51 per cent of the total votes polled in the second round is declared the winner. Elections symbolize the sovereignty of the people and provide legitimacy to the authority of the government. Thus, free and fair elections are indispensable for the success of democracy. Free and Fair Election is a mandate given by our Constitution for a Parliamentary Democracy. The word 'Democracy' coined in the preamble can be realized if we have the content of free, fair and effective election process in our system, only free and fair elections to the various legislative bodies in the country can be guarantee the growth of a democratic polity.

Keywords: Democracy, elections, corrupt, electoral system, political party and election commission.

Introduction

India has the distinction of being the largest democracy of the world and elections form the integral part of it. While politics is the art and practice of dealing with political power, election is a process of legitimization of such power. Democracy can function only upon this faith that elections are free and fair and not rigged or manipulated. They are effective instruments of ascertaining popular will. The elections are not being held in an ideal condition because of the enormous amount of money required to be spent and large muscle power needed for winning the elections. While the first three general elections (1952-62) in our country were by and large free and fair, a noticeable decline in standards began with the fourth general election in 1967. Over the years, Indian electoral system suffers from serious problems. The election process in our country is the progenitor of political corruption. The distortion in its working appeared for the first time in the fifth general elections, 1971 and multiplied in the successive

elections especially those held in eighties and thereafter. Some of the candidate and parties participate in the process of elections to win them at all costs, irrespective of moral values. 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 has no chance of either contesting or in any case winning the election.

The Democratic future of India depends upon healthy political environment, and to protect it free and fair election process is inevitable. The entry of criminals in election must be restricted at any cost. A number of commissions and committees have examined the issue of criminalization of politics however; the problem is increasing day by day. The parliament has taken efforts by amending the laws but the exercise has proved futile. The Supreme Court of India has also made efforts to keep a check on the evil of criminalization of politics but the problem remains unbeatable, though it had not made any radical suggestion however, whatever suggestions being made are not acceptable to the politicians. There exists a wide gulf between preaching and practice in today's modern political era. Actually, the roots of the problem lie in the political system of the country. There is lack of political will to combat the problem. As being said earlier, Election is a soul of Democracy, that not only nourishes the faith of common person in the ideals of democracy but also protect the nation from the threat of authoritarian politics. Weak electoral system is a biggest threat not only to the national integration but also to the Democratic Consolidation of India.

Electoral Reforms of radical nature can only save this glorious nation from political deterioration. Sanctity and purity of Elections must be protected at any cost, as the future of India depends on it.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the electoral reform in India
2. To know the issues and challenges in electoral politics in India
3. To assess the political reforms and structural reforms in India

Methodology

The present study based on secondary data. The secondary data collected from the books, journals, articles, magazines, newspapers, internet etc.,

Issues in Electoral Politics of India

Money Power: Money power plays a very destructive role in working of periodic elections. It leads to all round corruption and contributes mainly to the generation of black money 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. Elections in Indian are becoming increasingly expensive and gap between the expenses incurred and legally permitted is increasing over the years. 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.

Criminalisation of Politics: During 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. Political parties tap criminals for fund and in return provide them with political patronage and protection. Rough estimates suggest that in any state election 20 per cent of candidates are drawn from criminal backgrounds: 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 of country are forced to vote for the local strongman. Tickets were given to the candidates with criminal records even by National Party. Our politics have been corrupted because the corrupt and criminals have to entered it, criminalisation of politics has become an all-pervasive phenomenon.

Casteism: Many political parties in India are lending strong support from certain caste groups resulting in struggle among political parties to win different caste groups in their favour by giving offers to them. Political parties determine policies and programme as well as the nomination of electoral candidates on caste considerations at all the levels. Candidates therefore selected not in terms to accomplishments, ability and merit but on the appendages of caste, creed and community. Ultimately caste becomes the deciding factor on selection of candidate.

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 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 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. Due to degeneration of leadership, parties have been entangled in power struggle for the sake of personal ends. The Gandhian value of the spirit of service to the nation has become completely extinct from the present day politics. The money and muscle powers are the basic evils that pollute and defile the process and motivate participants to resort to mal practices in elections. This leads to the decline of moral values in the arena of electoral politics. A game can be fair only if the players are honest and true to its spirit.

Financial transparency in political parties: This is also one of the fundamental deeper political reforms that is a necessary precondition that must be satisfied before any meaningful electoral reforms can actually take place on the ground. Bulk of the donations are currently from unknown sources of funds and the introduction of 'Electoral Bonds' has made the financial transparency even more opaque than earlier. Political parties should be required to maintain proper accounts in predetermined account heads and such accounts should

be audited by auditors recommended and approved by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), and available for the information of the public.

Internal democracy in political parties:

This is arguably the single most critical and important reform needed to make India a truly democratic society. It is absolutely beyond any doubt that political parties are sine qua non (political parties are an essential requirement) of a representative democracy, that India has chosen for itself. The critical issue is how do they function or how should they function. While it would be normally expected that political parties which function in a democracy, and claim to be defenders of democracy at every opportunity, would should function, in their own internal functioning, in a democratic manner but that, as we have observed, unfortunately, this does not happen.

Political Reforms

Political Reforms It needs to be understood that mere periodic holding of elections to Parliament and State Assemblies, and occasionally to Municipalities and Panchayats, is not enough for a effective or a vibrant democracy, as we pride in calling ourselves. The underlying democratic foundations are severely lacking in the political system in India. No electoral system can provide real and effective representation for the larger societal aspirations unless the political system underlying it is not democratic in real terms. Some of the areas of concern are:

Institutionalization of political parties:

Need for a comprehensive legislation to regulate party activities, criteria for

registration as a national or State party, derecognition of parties.

Structural and organizational reforms:

Party organizations-- National, State and local levels; Inner party democracy-- regular party elections, recruitment of party cadres, socialization, development and training, research, thinking and policy planning activities of the party. Party system and governance: Mechanisms to make parties viable instruments of good governance.

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. There is need of sincere and genuine efforts by all side; especially political parties should be neat and clean in this matter. The main problem is not lack of laws, but lack of strict implementation of these laws. In order to eradicate these unfair practices in election, there is a need to strengthen the hands of Election Commission and to provide them more legal and institutional powers. The recent debate for simultaneous elections should be taken forward in a positive direction and this needs some practical measures, so that the elections for Parliament and state Assemblies could be conducted

simultaneously. This is an idea where all political leaders must deliberate on this reform and evolve a common consensus.

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