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ROLE OF FREE, FAIR AND CREDIBLE ELECTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

Elections are one of the basic elements in ensuring democracy because they “facilitate citizen’s participation in governance, ensure government accountability and encourage political competition”. The free, fair and credible election is one of the basic and crucial prerequisites and elements of democratic government and governance. The election would be credible, when rules, regulations and laws governing the electoral process will be followed by ultimately, the credible candidates will be freely and fairly elected represent the electorate. According to Diamond free and fair elections have major four components. They are: (i) Independent political parties will compete in electoral process in freely and fairly; (ii) Individual voter must be free to participate in politics and election process based on their will and wish; (iii) Election process would be transparent and every adult franchise can apply their voting right without any discrimination and (iv) Finally, outcome of the election or counting vote would be accurate and legitimate. Thus, when all four variables mentioned above will be available in the process, conduct and outcome of an election, that election could be considered to be free, fair and credible. Constitution of India provides for periodic elections, which ensure democratic transfer of political power from one set of representatives to other. The election commission of India independent and non-partisan body supervises directs and controls elections in India. Elections commission did great job in ensuring free and fair elections so far yet, there is need to adopt certain electoral reforms for sustainable democracy.

KEYWORDS

Democracy, Election commission, Electoral reform, Free and Fair election.

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INTRODUCTION

It is an essential condition for the success of democracy that people maintain their allegiance towards the democratic institutions based on rule of law. The more the elections are free and fair, the stronger the allegiance the people will have towards democratic institutions. Contrary to this, if the

elections aren't free and fair, the people will not have faith in democracy.

In India, which is the largest democracy in the world in terms of vastness and population, governments both at the center and in the constituent states are elected for five-year terms. In every periodical election people participate and elect their representatives with hope that the elected representatives will represent their will, wish and work to attain the goal of progress, prosperity, unity and integrity of India as also to ensure rights and freedom of the people.

Importance of election in democracy

Following are the some significant role election plays in democracy:

Elections are the means to establish democracy

Through elections only we can establish democratic set of government. People are given opportunity to select their representatives on whom they have trust and belief that elected representative will understand their wishes or expectations. In India the elections are not new and they started taking place before independence from British rule itself. But before independence the franchise was quite limited and very few were having rights to participate and vote. After independence, India adopted universal adult suffrage and each adult Indian got the right to vote.

Election provides ways and platform for the citizen

To choose representatives, choose the party which they want to see at the position of power, ideally based on the policies which they want the state to adopt and follow in government.

Elections also provide a way to punish the government or ruling party

If the people are not satisfied with the performance of the government then they can easily show them way out in the next election.

Elections serve as forums for the discussion of public issues and facilitate the expression of public opinion

Moreover, where the electoral process is competitive and forces candidates or parties to exhibit their performance and present their future plans before people and get people feedback. Thus, elections provide good platform for the debate and discussion

over the public concerned matters and facilitate the expression of public opinion. Elections thus provide political education for citizens and ensure the responsiveness of democratic governments to the will of the people.

Elections serve a self-actualizing purpose by confirming the worth and dignity of individual citizens as human beings

Whatever other needs voters may have, participation in an election serves to reinforce their self-esteem and self-respect. Voting gives people an opportunity to have their say and, through expressing partisanship, to satisfy their need to feel a sense of belonging. Even nonvoting satisfies the need of some people to express their alienation from the political community. For precisely these reasons, the long battle for the right to vote and the demand for equality in electoral participation can be viewed as the manifestation of a profound human craving for personal fulfillment.

Elections ensures political equality and popular sovereignty

As people arrive to vote, they have to queue in the order in which they arrive and no preferences are made on the basis of wealth, status or any other social marker. For those who are routinely discriminated against on the basis of caste, colour, class and religion in everyday life, this extraordinary glimpse of egalitarianism is valued. There by people consider themselves as participating in the most basic act of democracy that enshrines political equality and popular sovereignty.

Elections provide procedural protection for individual and groups against possible tyranny of power

If voters decide to once again offer their support, the mandate to govern is renewed and awarded for the next term in office. In a situation where voters withdraw their support, alternation of power is possibility. It is a procedural protection for individual and groups against possible tyranny of power in the democracy.

Electoral reforms

The urge for Electoral reforms is not new one it was seriously considered immediately after the first General Elections. Meaningful seminars, workshops

and conferences have striven to go deep into the electoral shortcomings and have also suggested concrete reforms. The Election commission also after every general election has been making concrete suggestions for effecting improvement in the system. Though the election commission of India did great job in ensuring free and fair elections since from its inception by managing huge illiterate, ignorant population is having vast diversity in culture, language, and geography facing money and muscle power of representatives. But still there is need of some electoral reforms required to strengthen our democracy, ensure rule of law. Following are the required electoral reforms for sustainable democracy:

Amendment to the antireflection laws

As aptly recommended by the Goswami committee to restrict disqualification only to those cases where an elected member voluntarily gives up his membership of political party. The power of deciding the legal aspect of disqualification should be taken from the speaker or chairman and entrusted to the President or Governor who will act according to the Election Commission's recommendations. There is need to develop ethical responsibility among the political leaders in carrying such unethical practices.

Restricting the candidate to contest only one constituency

A person should not be allowed to contest from more than one constituency at a time. If, however, the Government does not accept this proposal, the candidate winning from both the seats should be asked to pay for the cost of bye election. As already Election Commission recommended Rs.5 lakhs for Assembly and Rs.10 lakhs for the Parliament seat can be adopted.

Right to recall the MPs and MLAs

Before completion of tenure must be given to the voters to recall their elected representatives if they are not working accordance with people satisfaction. This will tone up the choice of representatives and serve as 'Sword of Damocles' on the heads of elected representatives.

Simultaneous election to the Lok-sabha and all state Assemblies

Which saves lot of national resources? Not only it saves public money but also human resources going to employed to carry out election activities. It also avoids hindrance of developmental works in name of election modal code of conduct. Natural resources like petrol, diesel, electricity, paper etc are saved.

An independent Secretariat for the Election Commission to be set up

The EC recommended that on the lines of the secretariat of Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, should be allowed to set up an independent Secretariat of its own. That may improve its functioning and curtail dependence on the Personnel Department for its staff.

There should be ban on donations to the party from abroad

The party in power should resign before elections
The elections should be conducted under regime of non-political caretaker Government as in the case in Bangladesh.

Improved techniques of voting

Can go a long way in curtailing the number of invalid votes. EVM should be used throughout the country. That will help avoiding booth capturing and snatching ballot boxes or casting votes after affixing the stamps.

Prescribing necessary qualification

To Chief Election Commissioner and other election commissioners. The Election Commission should be always be headed by unbiased and courageous chairman.

Impersonation of Voters

Since the implementation of our constitution, impersonation of voters has been a main prank of main political parties which matter the most. Even the dead voters could cast votes and handicapped and absentees from constituency could be impersonated with the connivance of their families the candidates agents and some polling officers. Money plays vital role in such cases. The institution of Identity Cards is an admirable step to curb this practice. However electoral machinery responsible for issuing of these cards requires toning up. Mistakes of names, age, wrong parentage or affixing

of wrong photos on the card annoying and times misleading. Even now, many people have failed to get their Identity Cards and bulk of them find in name, in age and certain cases name of father wrongly mentioned on the Identity Cards. Correction requires numerous trips to the election office which most voters cannot afford.

Need to change the election Rules

It has been discovered that electoral rules are full of shortcomings. Hence most of the unhealthy practices go unpunished in the courts. In fact, it is too difficult to prove them. For example the canvassing for vote on the basis of caste or religion and providing vehicles to the voters from distant places of their resident to concerned polling booth and back them.

Disposing the Election Petitions as early as possible

It has been discovered that election petition is filed in the court of law, its decision is unduly delayed. By the time action of the petition is conceived, the tenure of the candidate elected through allegedly unfair practices, is completed. Hence the purpose of petition stands defeated.

Proper education to the electoral

It is imperative to educate the significance of voting rights among masses to ensure conscious participation of the people in the election, reserving the right to recall. Education with respect to importance of their participation in democracy through election, testing of candidature, remaining free from influences etc. If every adult take part in election and discharges their duty in right full manner definitely we can expect responsible representative government.



CONCLUSION

The need of hour is responsible representative government; we can expect it only when elections are to be conducted free, fair and credible manner. Once elections are conducted in this manner people can elect their representatives with their will not by influence of religion, cast, bribe, gift falsely assurances .We can observe absolute people's participation without fear and domination of any parties to elect their chosen candidates. Hence, free and fair elections mean universal and equal access to the election process and to ballots which are secret and free. This requires an absence of fraud and threats and that the votes are applied fairly into elections in a transparent manner and in accordance with the law.

On account of emergence of coalition era, stability of our governments both at state and central level has gone to the winds. Hence there are too frequent elections. The voters develop a sort of electoral fatigue. They avoid going to the polling station avoid standing in line, awaiting their turn and sometimes exposed to criminals' intimidation and assault if they persist for voting according to their conscience. This attitude should be changed specially among youth and educated masses. All should take voting as a mandatory duty one has to discharge it with will. One should behave like responsible citizen to ensure successful democratic system of government.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

We declare that we have no conflict of interest.

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