

INDIA'S DEMOCRATIC FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL REFORM: A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW

Anantha

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Sir M.V. Govt. Arts and Commerce College, Newtown, Bhadravathi Taluk, Shimoga District, Karnataka.

ABSTRACT

Indian democracy is the biggest democracy in the world. Elections are the most integral and important component of politics in a democratic system of governance. True democracy can function only when elections to the offices of power are held in a free and fair method. Electoral process and electoral politics is the life and soul for consolidation of parliamentary democratic system in India. The free and fair elections are fundamental root for success of democracy. Political stability can secure through people's political participation. Electoral system is necessary and important instrument to make parliamentary democracy work. Under the constitutional values and guidelines of election commission free and fair elections are held at regular intervals in India. To make them from free of flaws it is essential to reform the electoral system from time to time. This paper evaluates issues and challenges of electoral reforms in India democracy.

Keywords: India and Democracy, Election, Electoral Reforms, Election Commission, Political Participation, India's Electoral Reforms.

INTRODUCTION

Elections are the foundation and pillar of a democracy. Elections are very important in democratic countries. Likewise, no democratic government can succeed without an electoral system. Only if elections, which have the power to change the direction of the country's development, are held impartially and freely without any hindrance, the country's democracy will be successful and a government in accordance with the aspirations of the people will come to power. Elections are seen as the most integral part of politics in a democratic system of governance. India which is the largest democratic country in the world, is a model for other countries to conduct elections successfully. A true democracy can function only when the elections are free and fair. Decades after the country's independence, debates about reforming India's electoral system began across the country. Elections and electoral reforms play an important role in maintaining the integrity of the country's democracy and its values. Because elections are the heart of democracy, political parties and candidates are its lifeblood. Elections are a good way to measure the achievements and strengths of the representatives. An election is a contest for power between various parties, and the party with popular support comes to power.

Election is the process of choosing a responsible person or group who will help a group of people to fulfill their aspirations, provide basic facilities for life, enable them to live happily and comfortably. Elections are a powerful weapon in the hands of the citizens to control the political system. The electorate is the heart of the electoral system. Citizens participate in elections held from time to time to elect a government that conforms to their sentiments and ideologies. The power of people in elections is so effective that as voters have the power to save a falling government or bring down a stable government. Free and fair elections are a hallmark of a healthy democracy. Today in India money, caste and physical power play a decisive role in elections. This is actually undermining the democratic values that everyone

agrees on by corrupting the whole system. Due to political criminalization, polling booth hijacking, riots, competition from candidates who do not take the election seriously are seen in the election process. Therefore, if the Election Commission, which is responsible for conducting the elections, does not take some reform measures urgently, the whole system is in danger of collapsing. Today violation of Policies laid down by the Election Commission by the political parties, candidates and party workers which is a matter of serious concern. During elections, we notice through media that many political parties and electoral candidates carry and use various types of things illegally, including money, liquor and other gifts.

CHALLENGES BEFORE ELECTION SYSTEM IN INDIA

India's electoral system is facing many challenges and problems today, due to which the country's democracy is on the verge of collapse.

Influence of money in elections

Even though the Election Commission decides how much money candidates have to spend in each election, today candidates spend crores of rupees on campaigning. It means that more money is being spent than the limit decided by the Election Commission.

Politicization of criminals

Candidates with criminal records contesting elections seems to be a big problem at present. Political parties support political criminalization by giving tickets to such candidates as seen through the media reports. It is seen as a challenge to the country's democracy that candidates with criminal backgrounds are being elected. It is a matter of grave concern that such criminal elements are spoiling the sanctity of democratic system of elections.

Misuse of Government machinery

In recent times it is seen that political parties in power are using government vehicles for election campaign, issuing election advertisements at government expense, using government officials to carry out election functions. It is evident here that the government machinery is being used for irregularities of election.

Influence of caste in elections

Contemporary politics is not apart from caste, witnessing the media statistics of past few decades, caste system has influenced politics to the extent of determining the fate of the contesting candidates in the relevant elections. It has become quite common for the political parties to use the caste card very cleverly in the elections. Political parties in general during elections, decide about the candidates on the basis of caste. Today politics has not remained ideology-based however it has become a caste-based. Caste based politics works to divide the society on the basis of caste to provide electoral benefit for some political party. This could be seen as a great challenge to the unity and integrity of the democratic set up.

Influence of Communalism in Elections

The greater challenge before electoral system of a country is that, political parties are trying to win elections on the basis of communalism by strongly sowing emotional issues like caste, religion and region among the people of the country, that too especially among the youth. The development of the country depends upon the younger generations. If the political parties capitalize on this during elections by creating communal riots in the name of caste and religion, then it leads to serious problem for the country's democratic system and hinders the proper development of the country in general.

Violation of Election Code of Conduct

During the elections, it is seen that the political parties and candidates are violating the election code of conduct implemented by the Election Commission, insulting each other, making speeches that create hatred for each other and the people, and committing excessive electoral irregularities. It has been noticed that the parties and party workers contest not just ideologically but verbally abuse the opposing candidates and their parties by creating unrest during the times of elections.

System of competing simultaneously in multiple fields

The Representation of the People Act allows a candidate to contest from more than one constituency simultaneously. But if a candidate wins both the contested constituencies, he cannot be the representative of both the constituencies. Instead, one should keep one constituency and resign to another constituency. Hence one constituency remains vacant after the election as the candidate chooses one constituency.

Family politics

Another aspect of concern that has been debated widely and considered the biggest threat to the country's democracy is family politics. Family politics is deemed harmful to the development of the country, because it contributes nothing to the development of the country, instead it is responsible for the development of the family of the politicians. It denies equal opportunity to the deserving which is the basic tenet of democracy. Family politics is one of the factors that are harmful to the development of our country and hinders the success of democracy. The democracy of the country will be successful only if these harmful factors are eliminated or prevented.

ELECTORAL REFORMS

Electoral reforms can strengthen the democratic process by bringing more people under the electoral process, reduce corruption and make India a stronger democracy. The Election Commission, which is responsible for conducting all the elections in the country, has been designing and implementing many reforms to conduct free, open and fair elections in the country since the constitution came into force.

The Prohibition of Defection Act was enacted in 1985 to prevent elected representatives from defecting to other parties before the expiry of their term.

- The voting age was lowered from 21 years to 18 years in 1989.
- During O.N. Sheshan's tenure as the Chief of the Election Commission of India in 1990, the use of voter ID card with the photograph of the voter was introduced.
- Declaration of the assets, criminal background, education and other backgrounds as mandatory for every candidate to contest in the election.
- The election commission fixes and monitors the election expenditure limit of the candidates in each election.
- To prevent irregularities in elections, ECI has made it mandatory for voters to have their name and photograph in the electoral roll along with the voter card.
- Initiated the use of Electronic Voting Machine for the first time in the world to prevent corruption, irregularities and electoral malpractices in elections.

- “NOTA” system has been implemented all over the country. By that, if the people do not like any of the candidates who have contested in the elections, they have the opportunity to cast a negative vote.
- In addition, to EVMs a ‘Systematic Verification Mechanism’ has been implemented to help voters ensure which party or candidate they have voted for this system is called “Voters Verifiable Paper Audit Trail”.
- To increase the participation of the youth in the elections, a great initiative has been taken to identify the eligible voters above 18 years of age and include their names in the electoral roll on 1st January every year.
- Every year 25th January is celebrated as ‘National Voter's Day’ across the country to create awareness about elections and voting among the new and young voters of the country.
- Made it mandatory for political parties to provide information to the Election Commission if any of the political parties in the country received donations of more than Rs.20000.
- The Election Commission has directed that the ‘Exit Poll Results’ can be broadcast only after completion of the final phase of the elections to prevent influencing the voters in the elections.

REFORMS TO BE IMPLEMENTED TO STRENGTHEN INDIA'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Although the central government and the Election Commission of India have implemented many reforms to strengthen the electoral system of the country, to conduct free and fair elections and to increase people's participation in elections. It can be observed that irregularities are still taking place in the elections and people's participation is low. Therefore, if the Election Commission implements the following measures to further strengthen the electoral system of India and conduct it freely and fairly, the election and democracy of the country and its aspirations can be successful.

- Banning persons who are facing charges of serious crimes such as murder, rape, kidnapping or extortion from contesting elections can prevent criminals from entering politics.
- Candidates contesting elections must disclose their assets and financial sources by submitting declarations compulsorily.
- Political parties must declare their sources of funds, expenditure related accounts.
- People should be made aware about the use of ‘Electronic Voting Machine’ and training should be organized in this regard.
- The state should implement a system of bearing election expenses. This will control election expenses and circulation of black money in elections and enable worthy and capable persons without financial support to contest elections.
- To systematically detect and punish those who lure voters through clothing, money, liquor or gifts and cancel candidature of such contestants.
- Streamlining the electoral process, empowering the ‘Election Commission’ to take measures to increase voter turnout.

- Aadhaar Number- Linking Aadhaar number to Voter ID card like PAN number is linked thereby avoiding duplicate voting and having two sides of Voter ID card.
- More people should be motivated to participate in the election process, for that those who are engaged in the election work should go from door to door to spread awareness among the people aware of the importance of participating in the elections.

India is the largest democracy in the world. Elections are the integral and important part of politics in a democratic system of governance. In this regard, to protect the sanctity of the electoral process and provide free and fair elections, the Election Commission of India has brought many reforms in the country. India has presented itself as itself as a country with the best electoral system in the world. Election Commission has introduced many reforms along with simplification of electoral process and making it transparent. However, the Election Commission needs to pay attention to some illegal and hidden activities that are going on beyond the rules of the Commission. Therefore, the commission needs to introduce strong laws and focus on the anti-constitutional and illegal activities going on behind the scenes during election process.

CONCLUSION

Electoral reform is a change in electoral systems which alter how public desires are expressed in election results. Electoral reforms can make the democratic process more inclusive by bringing more people under the electoral process, reduce corruption, which is pervasive, and make India a strong democracy.

REFERENCE BOOKS

1. Electoral Quotas in India”, Oxford University Press, USA, 2017.
2. Fadia BL “Indian Government and Politics”, Sahitya Bhavan, Agra, 2015.
3. Francesca R Jensenius “Social Justice through inclusion: The Consequences of Electoral Quotas in India”, Oxford University Press, USA, 2017.
4. Gangadhar P.S. “Indian Constitution and Politics”, Chaitra Publications, Bangalore, 2015.
5. Pylee M.V. “India`s Constitution” Chand and Company LTD, New Delhi, 2009.
6. Rajashekara H.M. “Working of Indian Constitution” Prabodha Publications, Mysore, 2018.
7. Sanjay Kumar “Elections in India” Routledge Publishing, India, 2021.
8. Suresh K.G. “Indian Government and Politics”, Lakshmi Printings and Publishing House, Mysore, 2010