

SIMULTANEOUS ELECTION DESIRABLE IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Indian elections are termed as the greatest democratic carnival in the world but at the same time it involves a lot of money and man power. India being a vast country with 29 states, it faces election almost every year. In 2017, five states has faced election. In 2018, thirteen state will face election and in 2019, nine state will go for polls. This figure shows that our political leaders are always in an election mode and because of this their concentration is more on the vote bank politics rather than on the development of the country. They are forced to take popular decision which effects the socio- economic condition of the country. Besides all this the security forces and school teachers are also involved in the election duty which is a matter of great threat to the national security and hampers the education system of our country respectively. In this backdrop, The idea of holding simultaneous election seems very alluring as it has many benefits but then at the same time it has many challenges too. In present political set-up, it doesn't seems to be translating into a reality until and unless there is a consensus among all political parties. Therefore policies has to be framed very carefully in order to convince all political parties to come to one page. If at all simultaneous election is not possible, step should be taken to reduce the frequency of election without hampering the basic structure of the Indian constitution.

keywords: Election, Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assembly, India.

INTRODUCTION

Indian elections are termed as the greatest democratic carnival in the world and election commission has worked as a true watchdog of Indian democracy by conducting free and fair election in the country. Many of the third world countries are not yet successful in setting up a democratic polity. Therefore in those countries there is either a military rule or a rule by an autocratic government. But Indians are lucky that they have one of the lengthiest constitution in the world and a well-defined democratic setup. Looking back into the pages of Indian history, one finds that the first, second, third and fourth general election and state legislative assembly elections were held simultaneously and this is what Prime Minister Narendra Modi is stressing for. The 2014 election manifesto of Bhartiya Janta Party also contains this idea of holding simultaneous election. The BJP 2014 election manifesto declare that if this government comes to power then it will strive to conduct simultaneous election of both centre and the state legislative assembly. The idea of holding simultaneous election seems very alluring as it has many benefits but then at the same time it has many challenges too. In present political set-up, it doesn't seems to be translating into a reality until and unless there is a consensus among all political parties who are in power in the state. At present, there is a chance that while conducting this scheme some parties in the state may benefit while other may lose. Therefore policies has to be framed very carefully in order to convince all political parties to come to one page. Immediately after independence when simultaneous elections were held for both centre and the state, the situation was not same what it seems to be today. That was a one party dominant era called congress era which was an umbrella organisation under which people of many caste, creed, religion, region and taught came together and formed a part of one political party. That was an era where people used to debate because of difference of opinion and not because of intolerance and that was the time when the umbrella organisation called congress used to form the government in both the centre and the state. But slowly due to the growth of regional aspiration, many regional political

parties were formed and these political parties were successful in earning support of the people by raising the regional demand of the people of their state and formed the government. The congress popularity also started declining day by day and congress which was once called umbrella organisation shed its earlier stature which also resulted in forming many regional political parties. Looking into this background, however, whatever be the status of regional political parties and national parties in the country, the real question is whether simultaneous election should be held for both centre and the state assemblies or not? This research article is centred on this question to explore relevant pros and cons regarding this issue.

India has a federal democratic polity where people elect their representative for centre and the state in every five years. Article 83(2) of the constitution mentions the duration of the Lok Sabha as “ unless sooner dissolved, shall continue for five years”. The same principle applies to the state legislative assembly which is mentioned in Article 172 of the constitution. The central government is elected by the people of whole India; while in the state legislative assembly election, people of only that particular state participate in the voting process. But Indian constitution is silent about whether elections to the centre and state legislative assembly should be held simultaneously or separately. Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi flared off the issue of holding simultaneous elections to panchayats, urban local bodies, states and parliament, after that, this issue became a matter of national debate. Prime Minister invited public opinion on this view. Political parties seem to be divided on the issue. While some parties like Bhartiya Janta Party(BJP), All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam(AIADMK), Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam(DMDK), Shrimony Alali Dal, Asom Gana Parishad(AGP), Indian Union Muslim League(IUML) seem to stand for the holding simultaneous election as lot of financial and human resource get used due to frequent elections while parties like Congress, Nationalist Congress Party(NCP), All India Trinamool Congress(TMC), Communist Party of India(CPI) and All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) are totally opposed to the idea of holding simultaneous election of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly on the ground that it is not practically possible and not feasible in the present situation. While looking into the history of Indian election, one gets to know that, Immediately after independence, the first four elections held in the year 1952, 1957, 1962 and 1967 the general and state legislative assembly election were held simultaneously. But after that, sometimes the central government and sometimes the state government toppled and could not sustain for five years. As a result, elections were bound to take place where government had lost its majority. Now, one finds that the general election and state legislative assembly election are held separately. The main issue here is that, election involves a lot of muscle and money power. It is estimated that in 2009 lok sabha election more than Rs1,100 crore was spend while the expenditure had gone up to Rs4,000 crore in 2014 lok sabha election. The election commission of India has to deploy a lot of persons in a poll bound area. The security forces are diverted for the electoral work putting the countries’ external security in threat. Many preparations are done to conduct free and fair election which creates a huge burden on the public exchequer. The person contesting the election also spends a lot of money to woo the voters. Although there is a ceiling on the expenditure of the candidate but this ceiling does not apply to the political parties. The black money too comes into the picture during the election time. The political parties make use of both money and muscle power to get the voters on their side. There is a lot of wastage of the tax payer’s money while conducting election every time. Simultaneous election will not only reduce the cost involved in holding election but will also save precious time of public and political figures which will make space for important policy decisions and hence it will check policy paralysis by imposition of model code of conduct. In this backdrop let us look at some of the pros of constituting the general election and state legislative assembly election simultaneously.

According to 117th report on the reform and electoral law (1999) by the law commission of India, simultaneous election will bring stability in the government as it will give clear four years to political parties to focus on good governance. Law Commission in its report recommended that “we must go back to the situation where the election to Lok Sabha and all the legislative assemblies are held at once”. India faces election almost every year if elections to the panchayat are also included. In 2017 itself, five states has faced election. In 2018 thirteen states will face election. Again in 2019,

nine states will go for polls. Frequent election puts restriction on the government to take tough decision that is good for the country in the long run. Therefore, in 2015 again, the standing committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, law and Justice submitted its report to the Parliament on holding simultaneous election of the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assembly as it would reduce massive expenditure currently incurred for the conduct of separate elections and mitigate policy paralysis as Model code of conduct is imposed during the election time which puts on hold the entire developmental programme and welfare schemes. Winning election is the only motive of every political party, therefore, frequent election puts the ministers under the toe of the people, so they fear to take unpopular decision that will create burden on the people in the present perspective but may prove to be beneficial for the country in the future. Therefore, if election is held simultaneously then it will not put hurdles in the way of development of the country. Also politicians use every trick to woo some community or the other for the vote bank, which leads to polarisation of the issue thereby creating communal tensions. This atmosphere of disharmony among the people of different religion could be reduced if simultaneous elections are held. Further there will be an economic benefit of holding simultaneous election, as election is a highly expensive exercise which puts a huge burden on the public exchequer. Besides spending money politicians also invest their time for making election related programmes and speeches, which forces political leaders to be in an election mode perpetually which in turn encourages them to take populist measures that puts negative effect on the socio-economic condition of the country. Traffic congestion takes place in a city where political rallies are held that affects the day today functioning of the common people. Besides affecting the normal public life, essential services also get disrupted, Not only this a large number of teachers are also involved in the electoral process because of which education sector is badly affected during the election time, sometimes examination too get postpone due to election. This could be reduced to minimum if we adopt the policy of one nation one election.

Despite having many benefits of holding simultaneous election, still experts of this field doubt about the successful implementation of this scheme. Some of their area of concern regarding this issue are as follows:

- Mostly, national and state elections are fought on different issues, so when both elections will be held simultaneously then it is likely that national issue will dominate the state issue and vice-versa. There are also chances of getting the local and national issue being mixed up which may create a confusion among the masses. In this scenario, voters may end up privileging one set over the other in way they might not have done otherwise. But this argument against holding simultaneous election makes no sense as in this digital era where access to information knows no barrier and internet services has reached almost every household including the village area. Now, almost every person is connected with the social media. The benefit of connecting with social media is that, now political parties are also spreading their election manifesto through social media and hence mobilising the voters. Even election commission is very active in making people aware about election related reforms. It conducts many awareness programme which guides the people and also motivate them to choose their correct representative. January 25, is celebrated as a 'National Voters' Day' to encourage more young voters to take part in political process.
- The second area of concern is that the percentage literacy of India is still very low especially in the rural areas, and the irony is 68.84 percentage of Indian population resides in villages. Therefore critics speculate that the new change may not go well with the people as they are habituated to the old system of election. But this speculation too does not holds good as the first four election after independence were held simultaneously, but with premature dissolution of some state assemblies and centre government this cycle of simultaneous election of centre and state got disrupted and people got used to the system which prevails now and it should be noted that the literacy level then was much low than what it is today. Still people used their franchise very wisely.

- The political parties in state which have more days to spend in power May makes an argument that such move is politically motivated to put them down from power. This is a major allegation which every opposition party will make but for the interest of nation, good work should not be stopped because of the fear of allegations.
- Another issue which could come to surface in case of simultaneous election is that, it may lead to fraction among the national and state parties which could lead to unhealthy competition among them. Although this speculation holds good, but it must be noted that unhealthy competition among the political parties exist even today.
- Recent Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly election, 2017 was held in 7 phases from 11 february to 8 March. If this is a situation in just one state then when elections to all the state will be held simultaneously then there is a possibility that elections may take many months and declaration of result may take even more time. Also if all the elections are held at once then there is a possibility that everything may come to halt including the important government business which is not good for the country.
- Another speculation which experts really fear off is that what will happen if state government topples early without completing its tenure. It may again lead to a same situation which prevails today. Also if, President's Rule is imposed for the remaining year and if two different parties with contradictory ideologies are at the centre and the state then in that case governance will be undemocratic and people will feel like as if they are cheated. They will not get the governance for which they voted for. It can also lead to autocratic government in the centre.
- Another issue which comes into the picture while talking about simultaneous election is that, India is a federal polity. Holding simultaneous election may hamper the very nature of Indian polity. This issue is one of the cause of concern for many experts but even if elections are held simultaneously, state will be run by the state government and centre will be run by the central government.

Apart from these major challenges, simultaneous election will also have some administrative difficulty as one single state election is held in many phases. So for conducting the election of all the 29 states simultaneously will be a matter of great challenge. Also there will arise a security challenge as many illegal activity take place during election time like booth capturing, rigging etc.... India being a land of diversity, and every state has its own problem like insurgency, militancy, Naxalism etc...hence, every state poses different challenge to the election commission. So, many factors are taken into consideration before conducting election in any state. Therefore striking a perfect balance in every state is a matter of great challenge for the election commission. On October 4, 2017 election commission said that it would be ready for simultaneous election after September 2018 as there will be requirement of 24 lakh each electronic voting machines (EVM) and voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) Machines. In order to see simultaneous election a reality, state assembly will have to adjust its tenure with the centre. The NITI aayog in its report has suggested simultaneous election in two phases:-

Phase 1- In sync with the 2019 lok sabha election.

Phase 2- to be held midway (2021) at the interval of 2.5 years till all the state assemblies and lok sabha synchronises by December 2021. In September 2016, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited public views on the issue of holding simultaneous election on MyGov portal.

Simultaneous election is desirable in India, even if simultaneous election is not possible, step should be taken to reduce the frequency of election in the country. But for that, proper necessary reforms will have to be made before implementing it, including the constitutional reform and reform in the representation of People Act. For this all political parties will have to come on board by shedding its narrow party politics for the greater interest of the nation. Also it should be so done that it does not come in contradiction with the basic structure of Indian constitution.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study was to explore the various pros and cons of holding simultaneous election and find the possible prospects of it in the near future without affecting the federal polity of India.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article is primarily based on secondary data. Internet, journals, books and both print media and electronic media were referred for the study.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study is limited to the pros and cons of holding simultaneous election in India.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This article is limited only to the pros and cons of holding simultaneous election. It is a theoretical study based on secondary data.

DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

This article is primarily based on secondary data. Content analysis method was used for the study of data as this article is not a field work study because simultaneous election of lok sabha and state legislative assembly is not working on the ground. It is just a matter of national debate.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Simultaneous election is desirable in India as it will lead to a stable government whose focus will be on delivering good governance. Vote bank politics of the political parties will get a break for at least next four years. Apart from these it will also have economic benefits and it will also make space for important policy discussion. The focus will turn on the real issues concerning common people and good governance and it will also lead to election process being more quick, transparent and cost effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTION

Simultaneous election is desirable in India as it has many benefits. But it should not be implemented at the cost democratic norms and values and hampering the basic structure of the Indian polity, that is, federalism.

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