

Electrical Reforms in India

Electoral reforms have become essential for the smooth functioning of democracy in India. A lot of malpractices are eroding the electoral systems which are threatening the roots of our democratic polity. Booths are captured. Mass rigging follows. Violence is often seen at the electoral booths. Bogus rolls are made. The use of caste and religion are often made for securing votes. Criminals are entering the legislative bodies in large numbers. Anti-defection law is not able to check Aya Rams and Gaya Rams in Indian polity. The situation is really alarming in Indian electoral systems.

The electoral process has gone under heavy distortions and erosion. The reasons can be traced to increasing immorality in Indian politics. It has given rise to use of muscle and money power in elections. Elections have become too costly. Criminalisation of politics have made the situation worse. The entire system has become corrupt. Administration does not play neutral role. The nexus between politician, criminals and bureaucrats have led to such a deterioration in electoral processes. The selection of candidates is made on the basis of caste and religion. The political parties do not follow code of conduct and allow criminals to contest elections. Previously politicians used to take help of criminals for winning the elections through illegal means. Now criminals using same means contest and win elections. According to Election Commission, more than 700 MLAs and more than 40 MPs are having criminal background. The law to disqualify the legislators with criminal background and communal background is not implemented strictly. The law is also there for 6 years of imprisonment for those involved in booth capturing but who cares to implement. Instead the administration helps some of the candidates. There is no auditing on the election expenses. The ceiling is often violated. Votes are bought for money. Greedy people are driven towards money and favours. Contesting elections is not a cup of tea for honest, genuine and poor people.

The only remedy to check the gross distortions in the election system is electoral reforms. Few initiatives have been taken in regard to electoral reforms. The committee appointed by Jayaprakash Narain suggested reforms on the following points: (a) The use of money power in Indian elections (b) The misuse of official authority and machinery (c) Other forms of corrupt practices (d) The disparity between the popular vote secured and the number of seats obtained under the present system of election (e) Defects in the disposal of election petitions. Later on Dinesh Goswami's report on electoral reforms was equally important. It also suggested for state funding of elections, equal use of electronic media during elections, to end the nexus of criminals and politicians in politics, etc.

The Election Commission has come out with a directive that criminals will be debarred from contesting elections. If implemented strictly it will give a great relief to individuals as well as society. The Indian politics need complete cleansing. To check the influence of money power, state funding should be introduced. It becomes very difficult to implement the ceiling limit of expenditure during elections. The writing on walls and use of loud speakers should be banned. Of course, credit goes to T.N. Seshan, the ex-Chief Election Commissioner in cleansing the electoral process and making elections free and fair.

To make the elections free and fair, 100% introduction of photo identity cards should be made. It can change the rigging in elections. Election Commission should be given more powers in implementing the laws. Electronic machines should be used for counting purposes. Administration has to be made neutral at all costs. Stringent punishments should be imposed on the erring officials during elections.

One of the greatest defect is in our system of first past the post. This leads to disparity in between percentage of votes polled and number of seats. In no election any majority party has got more than 50% of votes but seats secured were even more than 3/4th the 1984. The government has always been formed out of minority votes. In order to check this disparity two types of system should be introduced. Half of the seats should be based on proportional representation in order to get wiser representation and remaining seats should be based on first past the post system. In order to change the non-seriousness of candidates contesting the election, heavy restrictions should be imposed on independents but criteria should be such that genuine and honest independents are not left out.

Anti-defection law should be reviewed in such a way that no defections are allowed. Present law allows bulk defection but individual defections are not allowed. But it has not served the purpose. Instead it is breaking parties with 1/3 of support. The law should be such that once somebody has defected from the present party he or she should go for fresh election. Also provisions should be made for recall of legislators. Then only this will become accountable.

The drastic electoral reforms are the need of the hour. Every political party should follow a code of conduct. There should be provision for minimum educational qualification for legislators. If we are giving too much of emphasis on literacy why should legislators be illiterate to rule over literate people. However, radical changes in the electoral system and in the law may not by themselves guarantee a fair election and a responsible government. It is no doubt, more a question of character than of law, otherwise the very purpose will be defeated, howsoever the law may be good and men or women are not of character.