



THE CHANGE IN ELECTING PUBLIC REPRESENTATION: ARE WE READY?

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INTRODUCTION

Election plays a significant role in establishing democracy in any country. It is a process through which the people's representatives are chosen by the people to represent them and ensure their development. In India, elections have been a crucial means of choosing representatives and fulfilling the needs of the people since 1947. It is a path through which political parties showcase their power and their commitment to serving the people. However, recently, certain changes were introduced by the ruling government in the election procedure, and they introduced an antiquated way of the One Nation One Election system, which proposes a unique approach to ensure a stable administrative system by holding One Election for the state and the Centre both at the same time. It established a government in the Centre and states at the same time, with the idea of developing the nation speedily and establishing a smooth administrative system in India. Nonetheless, every change has to go through the potential drawbacks and challenges before implementing such a system.

HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF ELECTION SYSTEM IN INDIA

India is the world's largest democracy with over 900 million eligible voters. The country conducts elections for the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament), Rajya Sabha (upper house), state legislative assemblies, and local governing bodies. The foundation of India's electoral system is enshrined in its Constitution, which provides for a federal structure with a clear delineation of powers between the central and state governments.¹

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¹ Dr. A. Shaji George, One Nation One election: A critical analysis of the Pros and Cons of Implementing simultaneous election in India, 2023, Volume 2 Issue 3, Partners Universal International Research Journal ISSN-2585-5602.

In South Africa, national and provincial legislative elections occur every five years, with municipal elections following two years later. In Sweden, elections for the National Legislature (Riksdag), provincial legislature/county council (Landsting), and local bodies/municipal Assemblies (Kommunfullmaktige) are set for a specific date—the second Sunday in September—every four years. For instance, the last election took place on September 14, 2014, and the upcoming one is slated for September 9, 2018. Meanwhile, in the U.K., Parliament's term length is determined by the Fixed-term Parliaments Act of 2011. Following independence, early general elections coincided with state legislative assembly elections. This continued until 1967, but disruptions arose due to the premature dissolution of certain state assemblies in 1968 and 1969.² This idea is not new to India. Earlier, when the nation had just gained independence, this rule was followed, but it was struck down by the central government due to the enforcement of the President's Rule over Kerala in the year 1969, and other state assemblies simultaneously. This disruption led to the dissolution of the House of People in 1970. The result was that the concept of a One Nation One Election was disrupted totally.

In the year 2018, the Law Commission submitted a draft on the same issue with a different name, which was named "Simultaneous Elections"³. According to the Law Commission, this concept of ONOE is feasible in the country because, with the application of this policy, there will be less financial imposition on the Election Commission of India in terms of services provided by security officers like the Police Department, and Central Armed Police Forces expenses. ONOE will also decrease the disturbance in the education procedure of government schools or government colleges, and it will be less burden on the government officers who work in election duty. These types of interruptions are usually caused by elections that are held at different times. Simultaneous election-holding is therefore preferable.

In 2014, when Narendra Modi was fighting as a candidate for the Central election, he made the statement that the simultaneous elections and the Mode of Conduct hindered lots of his developmental projects for the welfare of the country. To avoid all election hindrances and develop the country with a strong electoral procedure on 1st September 2023, the Central government proposes to establish a One Nation, One Election system in the country. To make this proposal more effective on 2nd September, 2023, a High-level committee on Simultaneous

² Dr. Arti Bhatnagar, 2023, Issue of One Nation, one election in Indian perspective, International Journal of multidisciplinary research, ISSN: 2582-2160.

³ Law commission submitted a report titled as "Feasibility of Holding Simultaneous Elections to the House of People (Lok Sabha) and State Assemblies, 2015.

Election was formed, headed by former president Ram Nath Kovind. The main objective of this committee is to explore all difficulties and the feasibility of conducting simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

IMPACT OF ONE NATION AND ONE ELECTION: AN ANALYSIS

One of the main arguments made in favour of One Nation One Election is that it will reduce political uncertainty and the government will be more focused on governance instead of electioneering. In a country of 143 crore people and 900 million active voters or eligible voters according to the rules, a single election will synchronise the electoral procedure and enhance the working pattern of the government. With the current election system, a ruling government or opposition always puts their focus on populism to attract voters. The concept of simultaneous elections will improve policy and provide regulatory stability in the country. The ability to focus on governance over elections will be developed in respective parties, and they will place more emphasis on work, policies and regulatory framework for the development of the country. Through a simultaneous election system in the country, there will be fewer disruptions between the state and central government, and the blame game between the state and central government will end. Earlier in the years 1952, 57, 62, and 67, when there was one election procedure for state and union assemblies, once they were synchronised, it established a 5-year tenure regardless of party standings. But as there are favouring points, there are certain difficulties also, like unexpected dissolution, bye-elections and independent candidates' representation, and these were the issues behind the abolition of the proposed system in earlier days. The government and the High-Level committee must see these complexities, and to achieve this goal there must be certain substantial changes must be made in the Constitution of India, like Articles 83, 85, 172, 174 and 356.

The other important argument in favour of aligned elections is cost savings from unified campaigns' election management costs. The frequent elections in the government put financial pressure on the election authorities. The regulating authority: Election Commission of India has to arrange multiple things like making polling booths, recognition of places for pooling booths and their expenses, deployment of security forces on polling booths, staff arrangement for every pooling booth, voting machines, security for transaction of voting machines from polling booths to counting place, election material to all over country. All of this preparation creates an enormous logistical burden on the Election Commission of India and creates economic pressure on the Contingency Fund of India. According to the latest report submitted

by the Election Commission of India in the year 2024 Lok Sabha Elections alone, expenses incurred were One Lakh Crore for all the facilities and preparation for organising an unbiased and fair election. Through this new One Nation One Election Policy, the administration cost of conducting elections at the state and central levels will be reduced significantly. Holding national and state elections together in a synchronised cycle avoids duplicative costs and improves operational efficiencies.

Another important argument in favour of simultaneous elections is that it supports the concept of Governance over Elections. The parties in the 5-year ruling period, focus was always diluted by their continuous efforts in state elections from time to time. They spent a lot of resources and time in preparation for other states or doing rallies by forgetting their ministerial work or their promises given to voters in the National Election. Additionally, simultaneous election makes respective parties more responsible towards their promises and their agendas for voters. They would devote more time to governance, policy-making and organisational developments in a more effective manner because now the parties won't get a second chance in another 5 years in terms of both state and national.

But as we all are aware whenever a change comes, it comes with an affirmative and negative remark at the same time, this policy has a Lack of accountability because of the same government- domination of national over regional parties – less frequent opportunities to defeat incumbent governments and the relevancy of regional issues and their demands will be less addressed over dominance of national issues. State elections or Vidhan Sabha elections played an important role in regional demands and needs. Voters use their votes to get leverage for the fulfilment of their local needs, and local welfare. With simultaneous elections, this will get difficult, and voters will witness the outsized importance of national issues like national security, foreign policy, national growth and national leadership at the place of their local area growth, citizens' everyday demands and their life-related issues will get undermined.

With another aspect, the accountability of the government to citizens will also be sacrificed in some instances. The government will be more focused on their all-over representation in the whole nation in the space of particular development of that locality, the resources, and the promises will be structured and distributed according to wide nation's needs. The accountability table of the government will become limited, and the questioning power of individuals or citizens of the country will also be limited. To some extent, it will impugn the concept of democracy and the main concept of quasi-federalism.

Another argument for disfavoring Simultaneous elections is that it will give limited space to smaller regional parties to point out their state development, vision and achievements that have an impact on their families because parties will grab their attention on national controversies. The mainstream parties like Congress and, the Bharatiya Janata Party will monopolise the election narratives around national issues, and the regional parties, who are limited by resources and their representation in their specific locality only, will lose their agenda and all of their past efforts. The regional parties contended that simultaneous elections would undermine India's federal polity as state issues would get less importance under the centralisation debates towards national election outcomes.

Another aspect of criticising simultaneous elections is the amendment to the Constitution of India. The prospect of simultaneous elections will bring major changes in Parts V and VI of the Constitution of India. Part V dealt with the executive, legislative and Judicial power of the Union, and Part VI dealt with the executive, legislative and Judicial Power of the State. The Legislative power and the strength of the houses in parliament and state legislatures, all represent the individuals of the country, the representation making procedural changes must align with the constitutional powers. The amendment procedure will take time, and then the adherence to changes in conducting elections will also take time and ultimately, the implementation process of simultaneous elections will also increase.

CONCLUSION

The Constitution of India supports the concept of a federal structure with state governance, which is known as a Quasi-Federal structure. This structure supports the state and union representation separately, and the whole electoral process, voters' psychology, election administration and political parties' agendas, all of these are structured and followed accordingly. This One Nation One election Policy will make one remarkable change in the Indian election system with proper execution is still a hard nut to crack. The concept was already introduced by the ruling government in the year 2019, but the hurdles to change remained till the year 2024, and the government failed to implement it. The High-Level committee for One Nation One Election supports that they have found solutions to reduce the frequency of elections, and they submit their report on One Nation One Election by contending it is core to Aspirational India. By following the high-level committee report, the joint parliamentary committee was established, and it started to work on the recommendations for it. The structure should address the issue as it would not infringe the concept of federal structure

and power should not be given in one hand, and the ruling government should not be used as an arbitrary power. The committee should address the question of whether India is prepared to reform its traditional approach to contesting elections without compromising the fundamental principles of its democracy. The concept of democracy should not be infringed upon or abolished by the act of legislative authority or by any particular government act.