FAIRNESS OF INDIAN ELECTIONS: A TIME-TESTED DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

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FROM THE DESK OF CHAIRMAN

We are in last phase of our assembly elections. India, the world's largest democracy, conducts elections that are often lauded for their scale, complexity, and integrity. The fairness of Indian elections is a testament to the robust democratic framework established since independence.

Each time, we have experience that the losing party raises concerns over some or other issues. In this article I ll try to delve into various aspects of election fairness in India, supported by historical incidents that highlight the resilience and credibility of the electoral process.

The Role of the Election Commission of India (ECI)

ECI, is the cornerstone of free and fair elections in India. Established in 1950, the ECI is an autonomous constitutional authority responsible for administering election processes at the national and state levels. Its primary functions include the preparation and maintenance of electoral rolls, the regulation of political parties and candidates, and the conduct of free and fair elections.

Some of the measures impremented by the ECI to ensure the fairness of elections, include:

1. **Model Code of Conduct.**
2. **Electronic Voting Machines**.
3. **Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail**

The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is a vital instrument employed by the ECI to maintain the sanctity and fairness of the electoral process. This code comprises a set of guidelines for political parties, candidates, and governments to ensure that elections are conducted in a free and fair manner, devoid of any malpractice or unfair advantage.

The MCC is divided into eight parts, each addressing different aspects of the conduct expected from stakeholders during the election period. To understand, below are the key guldliens:

General Conduct: This section prohibits activities that could disturb the peace and tranquility during the election period. Political parties and candidates are instructed to avoid:

*   Criticism of other parties based on unverified allegations or personal attacks.
*   Provocative speeches that can incite communal or caste-based hatred.
*   Use of places of worship for election propaganda.
*   Bribing or intimidating voters.

Party in Power: Special guidelines have been framed for the party in power to ensure a level playing field:

- Ministers and other authorities should not combine official visits with electioneering.

- No new schemes or projects can be announced that could influence voters.

- Government transport, machinery, and personnel should not be used for election purposes.

Meetings: Guidelines for holding public meetings and processions include:

- Seeking prior permission from local authorities.

- Ensuring that processions do not disrupt traffic or create public inconvenience.

- Avoiding the use of loudspeakers and other instruments that cause noise pollution beyond prescribed limits.

Polling Day: On the day of polling, parties and candidates are required to:

- Refrain from campaigning within 100 meters of polling stations.

- Avoid distributing liquor or other intoxicants.

- Ensure that no one obstructs the voters from reaching the polling booths.

Polling Booths: Rules concerning polling booths include:

- Setting up booths beyond 200 meters of the polling stations.

- Only one booth per candidate is allowed, manned by authorized personnel.

- No canvassing or display of election symbols near the polling booths.

We all know, how Mrs. Indira Gandhi's violated the electoral code of conduct and lost the case in the Allhabad high court. Mere use of a Government Officers viz Mr. Yashpal Kapoorfor her election campaign lead to her disqualification for 6 years. Just to circumvent the ruling that evening Mrs. Gandhi announced the emergency in India.

Further, 2014 General Elections was marked by the highest voter turnout in Indian history (66.38%), and was a testament to the robustness of the electoral process. The peaceful transition of power from the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) underscored the maturity of Indian democracy.

Despite these successes, Indian elections face challenges like Electoral Violence, excessive us of Money to buy votes, criminalization of politics, State Funding of Elections.

The fairness of Indian elections is a testament to the country's commitment to democratic principles. Despite facing numerous challenges, the Election Commission of India has consistently upheld the integrity of the electoral process through innovative measures and strict enforcement of laws. Historical incidents further illustrate the resilience of India's democratic framework, ensuring that the voice of the people continues to shape the nation's future.

Thank you all..... Always in Gratitude

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