

POLITICAL SCIENCE



CHAPTER - 21

THE ELECTION SYSTEM

We learn about the following in this chapter,

- Election Commission
- Process of election
- Political Parties
- Coalition governments
- Media and Democracy

India is the biggest democracy in the world. A free and fair elections are needed for a healthy democracy. In order to ensure free and independent elections in India, the part XV of the Constitution of India speaks about Independent Election Commission in India from articles 324 to 329. The election commission is an all India Institution. It has responsibility to conduct both the central and state elections. The Election Commission conducts local body elections under the article 324 K and AZ.

The Structure of Election Commission:

The article 324 speaks about the formation of Election Commission. The Indian Election Commission was founded in January 25, 1950. In the beginning it had only one Chief Election Commissioner. In 1989, through the Constitutional amendment 61, the minimum age of voting was reduced to 18 years from 21 years. This increased the work pressure of the commission. Hence, along with Chief Election Commissioner, two more Election Commissioners were appointed. In 1990, the posts of two Election Commissioners were removed. Again in 1993, the posts of two Election Commissioners were created. All the three commissioners enjoy equal powers. In case of differences in opinions, the majority decision prevails.

The President appoints the Election Commissioners. Their tenure is for six years or the completion of sixty five years of age, whichever is earlier. They can tender resignation at any given time.

The Parliament can impeach them on the grounds of incompetency and unconstitutional behaviors.

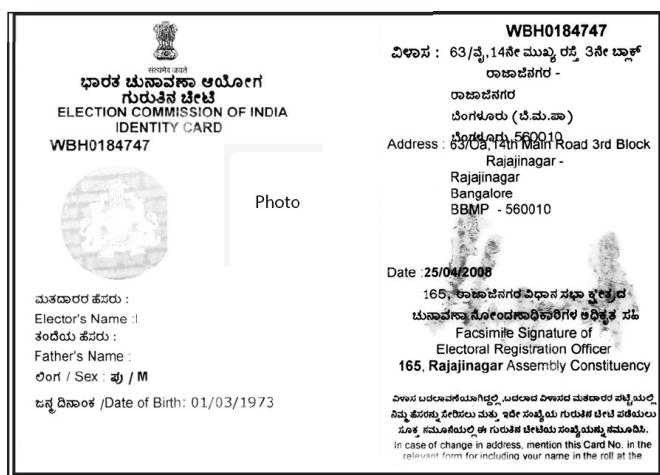
The Election Commission conducts the elections of President, Vice President, Rajyasabha, Lokasabha, Vidhana parishat and Vidhanasabha. It has absolute powers to declare the dates of election, declaration of the results and during the entire duration of election. This duration is called as 'Period of Model Code of Conduct'. The Election Commission has no employees of its own to conduct election. It appoints the government employees for this work with the approval of the President.

The State Election Commission conducts the elections of local bodies of Panchayet raj and urban local bodies. The Governor appoints the State Election Commissioner under article 243 K and ZA. In Karnataka, the State Election Commission has been formed under the article 308 of Karnataka Gram Swaraj and Panchayet act of 1993. This conducts the elections of local bodies.

Election procedure

Constituencies: The state is divided into small electoral divisions for the purpose of elections. These electoral divisions are called constituencies. Constituencies are formed on the basis of population. Constituencies are of two types. One is Lok Sabha Constituency and the other is Legislative Assembly Constituency. The members elected from Lok Sabha constituencies become the members of Lok Sabha. They are called Members of Parliament or MPs. Similarly the members elected from Assembly Constituencies become the Members of State Legislative Assemblies and they are called Members of Legislative Assembly or MLAs.

Voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) or verified paper record (VPR) is a method of providing feedback to voters using a ballotless voting system.



The electoral photo identity cards (EPIC)

In both these constituencies reservation is provided to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. These are called reserved constituencies.

Voters list: The voters list is the list which contains the names and certain other details of the voters. It is also called the Electoral Roll. The Electoral Roll is prepared by the Election Commission much before the elections. Electoral Roll is revised every year. At the time of revision the names of those who have attained the age of 18 are included and the names of the dead are deleted. The Electoral Roll helps the polling officials to identify the voters.

“None of the above”, or NOTA short, also known as “against all” or a “scratch” vote, is a ballot option designed to allow the voter to indicate disapproval of the candidates in a voting system.

The Electoral Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) are issued to all the eligible voters by the Election Commission to prevent impersonation. EPIC is also used as a proof for general identification. The voter must produce EPIC or any of the other identity proof such as PAN (Permanent Account Number) card of the Income Tax department, driving license, Passport or any other proof of identification specified by the government at the time of voting.

The government of India has made arrangements to issue Bio-Metric based unique ID numbers to all citizens. This is called ‘Aadhaar’ number.

Notification: The election process begins with the notification. The Election Commission issues the notification about the elections to be held. The detailed schedule or time table of the election is published or notified in the government gazette and also in other media like radio, TV and news papers.

Nomination of the Candidates: As ours is a representative democracy people have the right to elect and right to contest. The candidates who wish to contest the election must fulfil certain conditions and file their nomination papers before the authority appointed for the purpose. Candidates must deposit certain amount of money as ‘Security Deposit’ along with their nomination papers.

The political parties choose the candidates to represent the party. The authorization given by the political party to contest the election is termed as party ticket. The contestants getting the party tickets have the advantages of using the party symbol and the party support in the campaign. Many a time the party ticket proves beneficial to secure good number of votes from voters who owe allegiance to a political party. The contestants who are not identified with any political party are called 'independent candidates'. Such independent candidates are allotted symbols by the election commission.

Scrutiny of Nomination: The nomination papers filed by the candidates are scrutinised by the appointed authority. After scrutiny the names of the eligible and also the rejected candidates are announced.

Withdrawal of Nomination papers: After the announcement of the list, the eligible candidates are given time limit to withdraw their nomination if they desire so.

Election Campaign: The election campaign starts after the announcement of the final list of the candidates. The campaign must end 48 hours before the closure of election. During the campaign the political parties announce several policies and programmes and promise the people to fulfil those if voted to power. Such kind of promises are given in the 'Election Manifesto'. Public meetings, door to door campaigns, banners, cut-outs, posters, pamphlets, flags and catchy slogans are common during propaganda. All the contesting candidates have to follow the 'model code of conduct' announced by the Election Commission.



Voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT)



Picture of Electronic voting machine (EVM)

Polling day: Polling day is the day of voting or day of election. On the polling day the voters go to the assigned polling booths to vote. Polling booth is a place of voting. Polling officials are appointed to manage the polling booths. In the polling booths 'Ballot papers' are provided to the voters to cast their votes. Ballot papers contain the names of the contestants and the election symbols allotted to them. The election symbols help the illiterate masses and also others to identify the candidates.

Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) are replacing the ballot papers now a days. The voters record their votes through EVMs by pressing a button in front of the candidates. The ballot boxes or EVMs are sealed after the election and carried to the counting centres.

The returning officer is in-charge to conduct the election process in one designated constituency. He is appointed by the Election Commission. Presiding officers and polling officials are appointed to conduct the election in every designated booth.

Counting of votes: Counting of votes is done at the counting centres by the counting officials in the presence of the candidates and their agents. Counting of votes has become easier and quick with the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines. Under certain special circumstances recounting is permitted. In case of any disputes the candidates can approach the Court of Law. Returning officer declares the results at the end of the counting.

Political parties: Political parties are necessary in the democratic set up. Political parties are the link between representatives, government and the people. They play a major role in formulating policies for social and economic progress. Political parties become a training ground to develop leadership qualities. The political party that commands majority in the lower house i.e. Lok Sabha at the centre and legislative assembly at the state level form the government. The party that forms the government is called the 'Ruling party'. The party that commands the second position is called the opposition party. The minor political parties or independents can support either the ruling party or the opposition on their own.

National Parties: There are many political parties in India. These political parties are classified into national political parties and regional political parties. National political parties have their branches in many states of our nation. They have respectable number of representatives in Parliament and also in State Legislatures. The Election Commission grants recognition to National Parties. Indian National Congress, Bharathiya Janata Party, Communist Party of India are some of the major national political parties of India. They establish their identities through their own party symbols.

Regional Political Parties: Regional political parties are also called state political parties. Political organizations securing respectable number of seats in the assembly elections are recognized as state parties or regional parties. In many states the regional parties by virtue of their majority have formed the government. DMK, AIADMK (Tamilnadu), Assam Gana Parishad (Assam), Telugu Desham (Andhra Pradesh) Shivasena (Maharashtra) Janatha Dal (Secular) in Karnataka and Samajawadi party (UP) are a few major regional political parties. Regional political parties have their own election symbols.

Regional parties may have representation in the Parliament. Regional parties play an important role in forming the government when the major political parties fail to secure majority at the centre or the states.

Coalition Government: Many political parties participate in the elections to secure power. If they get the majority they form government. Many a time no party gets the required majority to form the government. Such a situation is called 'Hung Parliament' or 'Hung Assembly'. In such a situation some of the political parties join together and make alliances to get the required majority to form the government. Such alliance is called 'Post-poll alliance'. At certain times two or more than two parties join together and make alliance before the elections. This type of alliance is called 'Pre-poll alliance'. Pre-poll or Post-poll alliance helps political parties to join together to form the government when there is a hung parliament or assembly. Such a government formed with the co-operation of different political parties is called 'Coalition Government'. The political parties of Coalition

Government share power by joining Council of Ministers. At certain times they do not share power but support Coalition Government. This type of support is called 'outside support'. Since 1989, hung parliament or legislative assemblies have become common. Coalition Governments have been formed many times both at the centre and in some of the states.

Public opinion : Public opinion is a view expressed by common people on a particular issue that concerns them. It is not the opinion of majority or the politicians. The Government sometimes formulates policies and makes laws based upon the public opinion. The public opinion changes from time to time based on issues. The public must be aware of the issues and must be free to express their opinion without any fear or prejudice. The government and the political parties try to influence the public opinion. TV, Radio, News papers, Journals, Web site and such other media help in sharing the public opinion.

Media and Democracy : The day-to-day information about the happenings is provided by the media. It helps people to know about the plans and policies of the Government. It provides information about the functions of the Government. In turn, it helps the Government to know about the views of the people on important issues. Media make representatives accountable and answerable to issues raised by the people. The media must provide truthful, fearless, unbiased views. The media on the other hand should not sensationalize the issues. It should present the issues in such a way that the principles of unity, secularism, democracy and harmony are not disturbed.

Print media includes news papers and periodicals. In India the news papers and periodicals must be registered with a body called the 'Registrar of News Papers'. In order to improve the standards of news papers and to protect the freedom of press a body called 'Press Council of India' is constituted. The electronic media like television, Internet portals along with radio are active now a days. These are governed by the 'Broadcasting Act of 1962'. These have become a meaningful platform for exchange of information between general public, officials and political leaders.

EXERCISES

I. Fill up the blanks:

1. The Electoral roll is revised _____ year.
2. The Public Election Campaign comes to end before _____ hours to election day.
3. The recognition to political parties is accorded by _____.
4. The Independence of Journalism is protected by _____.

II. Answer the following questions briefly:

- 1 Write a note on 'Electoral Roll'.
- 2 Justify that "Political Parties are the link between elected representatives and people".
- 3 Write a note on Coalition Governments.

III. Activities:

- 1 Organize an essay competition on Elections.
- 2 Make a list of functions of Election Commission.
- 3 Make a list of Political Parties.
- 4 Discuss 'NOTA' - its advantages and disadvantages.

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