

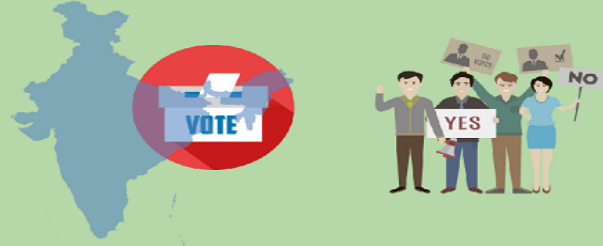


NEWSLETTER

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Simultaneous Elections in India



Simultaneous Elections in India

-By Shri T.S. Krishnamurthy, Former Chief Election Commissioner of India and Member Advisory Board, FRNV

Of late, there has been a considerable debate about the scheduling of the elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, particularly in the context of unduly long time taken in conducting the elections, voter fatigue in participating in too many elections, difficulties in effectively enforcing the Model Code of Conduct applicable to the political parties and the contesting candidates during a long election period. The case for simultaneous elections is based on the criticism that under the present constitutional framework, elections need to be held for the State legislatures and the Parliament at different times and that the country is kept on an election mode for a long period of time during each year. The consequence of conducting frequent elections for State legislatures and the Lok Sabha at different points of time is that a lot of money and time is spent both by the Election Commission/Governments (State and Centre) and the political parties as a result development activities of the government are kept on hold due to the enforcement of Model Code of Conduct during different periods. The criticism is largely true, as may be seen that an almost in every year, five or six states go for election at different times during a year apart from further risk of dissolving the assemblies due to frequent political rivalries among political parties, especially, if the winning party or alliance has only a wafer-thin majority over the opposition parties.

It has been suggested that in order to get over the above problems, the country should switch over to simultaneous elections for State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha at the same time. In fact, simultaneous elections were held in India for the Lok Sabha and

the State Assemblies in 1951-52, 1957, 1962 and 1967. This synchronised conduct of elections got disrupted from 1969 due to premature dissolution of assemblies at various points of time, and, in 1970, Lok Sabha was also dissolved early. The Law Commission, headed by Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy, stated in its 170th Report, in May 1999 that “we must go back to the situation where the elections to the Lok Sabha and all the legislative assemblies are held at once”.

Frequent elections, indeed, pose a heavy burden on the Election Commission, both in terms of financial expenditure and deployment of manpower to ensure free and fair elections. The heavy burden in funding the elections extends to all the political parties, the candidates and the Governments at the Centre and the States. It may be noted that when the elections are held to the Lok Sabha, without linking them to State elections, the expenditure in the conduct of election is entirely borne by the Centre. Similarly, if the elections are held independently for the States, without combining with the election to the Lok Sabha, the entire expenditure has to be met by the State Governments concerned. If the elections are held both for the State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha simultaneously, the total expenditure in conducting the elections by the Election Commission is shared by the State Governments and Central Government equally. As far as the expenses incurred by the political parties and the candidates are concerned, the campaign expenditure for each election (whether simultaneously or otherwise) is met by the political parties and the contesting candidates, as may be decided amongst themselves. No doubt, the administrative and financial burden in conducting elections separately has increased

considerably with the increasing number of States being carved out from the existing ones in recent times.

Another argument advanced by political analysts and some of the political parties is that, if the elections are held simultaneously, the voters may not be able to appreciate the merits of policy issues relating to the Centre and the States, as a result of which, it is said that federal aspects of the constitutional democracy will stand affected. The argument behind this is that the voters will not take into account the issues relating to the States, at the time of casting their votes if the elections are held simultaneously. This argument cannot be said to be totally tenable, if we look into the results of some of the past elections. For example, when the elections were held in Odisha, the voters voted differently for the Lok Sabha and the State Assembly. This is true also in States like Tamilnadu, Kerala, West Bengal etc.

The main question for consideration is whether simultaneous elections are a desirable option in the overall interest of our democracy. In view of the enormous hatred and violence taking place in recent times during election time and, in view of the enormous expenditure required to be met both by the Government and by the political parties it seems it is better to have simultaneous elections for both State Assemblies and Lok Sabha, notwithstanding the argument that it may not be able to protect the federal spirit of the Constitution. Administratively, there is no doubt that simultaneous elections will reduce a lot of problems in conducting the elections for the Election Commission, especially in the matter of enforcement of Model Code of Conduct, under which the Government and the political parties are expected to ensure a level playing field for all the political parties.

The main hurdle, however, in holding simultaneous elections, is the present constitutional provisions relating to the tenure of the elected Houses. In India, the Constitution provides for mid-term dissolution of the Houses, if the ruling party loses the confidence of the majority of members in the House. This is essentially based on the Westminster model followed in British Parliamentary democracy. In fact, the simultaneous conduct of elections to the State and the Centre till 1967 got disrupted, mainly because of this particular feature of our Constitution. Unfortunately, our political parties, which have

been increasing in number over the years and the aggressive stand taken by some of the political parties, especially when coalition governments are formed at the state level, the stability of the government becomes fragile due to frequent defections of elected members of political parties and dissolutions.

In view of the pros and cons in relating to the simultaneous elections, it can be said that, while it is desirable to hold simultaneous elections, on account of financial and non-financial factors, it may not be possible to implement, due to the constitutional provisions. Unless the Constitution is amended, providing for fixed tenure of the Houses, as is the practice in US Constitution, it is not possible to implement simultaneous elections as of now. No doubt, suggestions have been made by many including the Standing Committee of the Parliament that we could bunch the elections in a particular year and hold it in a single specific period so that the problems encountered in the present system can be minimised to some extent. Another aspect which needs to be considered at this stage is also to reduce the period of elections by avoiding multi-phase elections as at present. For example, in the 2004 General Election, except in some States like in Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh, the elections in other States were mostly held, either in a single phase or in two or three phases. The reduction in the number of phases is feasible if the availability of central para military forces is enhanced.

Finally, I hold the view that the need for simultaneous elections may not be very strong if some of the critical electoral reforms recommended by the Election Commission and Law Commission are implemented with a view to reduce hatred, violence and manipulations by some of the stakeholders. If election reforms are carried out expeditiously by eliminating criminal and corrupt elements who are spoiling the electoral system, the urgency for introducing simultaneous elections may not arise. It is unfortunate that almost all political parties appear to be happy with the status quo and have not shown any sense of urgency in implementing some of the most desirable reforms such as a separate law regulating the functioning of the political parties, prevention of candidates contesting in election with criminal record, public funding of elections and change from the present 'First Past The Post' system. It would, therefore, be appropriate to conclude that, in the absence of speedy implementation of electoral reforms, the urgency to implement simultaneous elections is

justifiable.

How a Nation can knowingly and deliberately destroy its own Moral fabric?

Government welfare programs and Freebies are doled out to buy the votes.

Japan does not have ANY welfare programmes like Free LPG etc.

Their motto:

Work for it or do without it!

These are possibly the 5 best sentences you'll read and all applicable to our Indian style of governance:

1. You cannot legislate the poor into prosperity by legislating the middle class out of prosperity.
2. What one person receives without working for, why another person must work for without receiving?
3. The Government cannot give to anybody anything that the government does not first take from somebody else.
4. You cannot multiply wealth by dividing it!
5. When half of the people get the idea that they do not have to work because the other half is going to take care of them, and when the other half gets the idea that it does no good to work because somebody else is going to get what they work for, that IS THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

ROLE MODEL 1:

'From Rs 50,000 Per Annum to an Income of Rs 3 Lakh': This Couple is Transforming Lives Of Villagers In Maharashtra

An experienced 65-year-old farmer, Arjun Dagadu, hailing from a remote village in Maharashtra, was merely earning ₹50,000 annually with his agricultural production. He only cultivated pulses and paddy in his 2-acre land and adopted traditional farming techniques. Although, with several exposure visits and training by Swades Foundation on

advanced agricultural production, he transformed his fate.



He decided to add another acre of land and started cultivating watermelons as well as other vegetables, along with his brother. Eventually, he took more land on lease and made an annual net profit of ₹3,00,000. He motivated 16 other farmers in his own village to uptake farming and guided them in becoming self-reliant. At the heart of many such transformational journeys lies the effort of Swades Foundation which has been efficiently working to impact rural lives and acting as a harbinger of change.

Taking the holistic development of rural lives into account, Swades Foundation was started with the single-minded focus of rural empowerment. It was founded by eminent personalities known for their entrepreneurial ventures, Zarina and Ronnie Screwvala, with the vision of impacting rural India. Rather than just focusing on one area, it works on four major verticals - Health & Nutrition, Education, Water & Sanitation and Economic Development to bring holistic change.

Encapsulating rural regions of Maharashtra, it currently works in seven blocks (Mangaon, Mahasla, Mahad, Poladpur, Tala, Shrivardhan & Sudhagad) of Raigad district. With the goal of economic development, it aims to increase the income of rural households critically through two diverse sources – farm-based and off-farm/non-farm based. It builds an entire ecosystem through which they get opportunities to change their own lives as well as provides them access to credit. The beneficiaries not just empower themselves but also set an example for others to follow.

Ronnie Screwvala shares, "Swades Foundation, focuses on rural development and our strategy to empower communities and exit will fail, if we do not focus on their economic development. For us,

it is not just about bringing families out of poverty but ensuring that the income is sustained and progresses. Without economic development, everything that we do in Health, Education, and Water & Sanitation will fail to sustain its impact as well."

Since its inception, Swades Foundation has given training to thousands of farmers and helped them adopt suitable practices, farming techniques required to aggravate their production. Convincing them for training has not been an easy task. However, with a strong team being engaged at the grass-root level as well as industry experts, it has been able to turn the dream into reality. It has over 700 community volunteers along with 300 plus staff working to ensure a robust execution. In fact, the foundation brings multiple stakeholders together - experts, government, donors and others, to solve issues on hand.

Talking about the problems faced in its operations, Zarina Screwvala shares that, "The biggest challenge is always the mindset – inculcating the 'can do' attitude. Of course, this is not an overnight process and requires sustained engagement efforts. Participation in training is another challenge. Taking them out of their routine and soliciting their active engagement is definitely a problem which we have observed. In most cases, we provide training to the community as we find it more impactful. Another aspect related to training is that it has to be ongoing, which is why we create community volunteers as master trainers and resource persons to ensure sustainability."

By shaping the dreams of rural farmers, the foundation has resulted in bringing a difference in other areas of their life as well. With increased confidence by growth in their income, they could take control over their lives and also provide their families with a better standard of living. The foundation works closely with the government in order to bring irreversible change. It believes that a collaborative model with government, corporate, various NGOs and multiple associated partners would help them to bring change on a larger scale. The vision of impacting 1 million lives in the upcoming 5 years could only be possible with such a unique model.

"We work very closely with the state and district administration and ensure that our work compliments. We have MOUs with the state government to work in schools and for health interventions. Also, we've signed a 'letter of intent' with the state government to create 1000 dream villages across Maharashtra and the process is underway to create the first few in a year or so. In our journey, we have met many inspiring government officers who are doing wonderful work in the most difficult circumstances. Why reinvent the wheel when together we can do a lot more," says Zarina Screwvala.

Critical to the success of their development model, the foundation is creating Village Development Committees (VDC) in all of the 2,500 hamlets which they work with to ensure sustainability in the long run. These committees are trained and empowered to take on the mandate of village development from Swades Foundation. So far, it has created over 1,000 VDCs and it continues to closely work and handhold them so that they are active, empowered and functional.

Apart from this, it has also been working on the education front to enable a better learning environment by working with schools, teachers, introducing e-learning and providing them with scholarships. It is also striving to provide primary healthcare facilities in rural areas with its intervention and linking government bodies. At the core, it believes that the economic development of the rural population is required for the inclusive growth of our country.

Source:

<https://thelogicalindian.com/exclusive/swades-foundation-transforming-lives-19635>

ROLE MODEL 2:

Sarpanch Popatrao Pawar, who transformed villages wins Padma Shri

Popatrao Baguji Pawar, farmer sarpanch of Hiware Bazar panchayat in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra India, has won Padma Shri.

Pawar also serves as the Executive Director of Maharashtra state government's Model Village programme. He is credited to have transformed it from an impoverished village into a model of development that the government of Maharashtra

wishes to implement across the state.



Pawar led Hiware Bazar's transformation from a drought-prone village to a green and prosperous model village, thus successfully reproducing Anna Hazare's Ralegaon Siddhi model of village development. He featured in an India Today cover story as the person who demonstrated how rural water resources could be revived.

The Hiware bazare gram panchayat, with Pawar as its sarpanch, won the first National Award for community led water conservation in 2007.

In relation to the control of malaria he is quoted to have said "Show me one mosquito (in Hiware bazar) and take away Rs 100."

Source: <https://indiacsr.in/rural-transformer-popatrao-pawar-wins-padma-shri/>

"India Conquered and dominated China culturally for 20 centuries without ever having to send a single soldier across her border"

— Hu Shih
(Former Ambassador of China to USA)

News & Events

□ FRNV Management Committee [MC] held a meeting with Poojya Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha ji [Inspiration & Guide] at the Centre for Inner Resources Development [CIRD], Vasundhara on 14-Feb-2020 to discuss FRNV's future plan and strategy. The President shared various activities undertaken by FRNV with the Karnataka & Kerala Governments, especially on value education and waste management. Swamiji suggested involvement of more members of society in taking up garbage disposal and solid waste management programmes. Swamiji was informed that FRNV had made a recommendation to the 'National Policy on Education Committee' on creating a Permanent National Commission for Education in the country and also for including value based education [VBE] in their final recommendations.

Swamiji again reiterated that Values should be national, eternal and not based on any religion.



Dear Readers,

FRNV invites stories from its readers on deep-rooted values that have helped us in our everyday lives. Some of these stories will be featured in the next issue of our newsletter. So put your thinking caps on, recall the values integral to your life which you cherish and write to us at shilpi@valuefoundation.in.

Chief Editor: Shri Gopal Ganesh