

9th - Electoral Politics II



Election Photo Identity Card (EPIC): In the last few years, a new system of Election Photo Identity card (EPIC) has been introduced. The voters are required to carry this card when they go out to vote, so that no one can vote in their place. The card has not been made compulsory for voting, and voters can show many other proofs of identity like the ration card, driving license or Aadhar Card.

Nomination of candidates: The system of our country provides almost no restrictions on anyone to contest election. This only makes any election a democratic election. Anyone who can be a voter can also become a candidate in elections. The only difference to be a voter is that the minimum age is 18 years while to be a candidate in election the minimum age is 25 years. There are also some other restrictions on criminals but these apply in very extreme cases.

Political parties nominate their candidates who get the party support and symbol. Party's nomination is often called Party Ticket. The candidate has to fill a nomination form and give some money as security deposit.

Moreover every candidate has to make a legal declaration giving full details of

1. Educational qualifications of the candidate
2. Details of the assets and liabilities of the candidate and his/her family; and
3. Serious criminal cases pending against the candidate.

The information provided has to be made public in order to provide opportunity to the voters to make their decision on the basis of the information provided by the candidates.

Educational Qualifications for Candidates: There is no educational qualification for candidates for being an MP or an MLA. However, the relevant qualification for candidates is the ability to understand people's concerns, problems and to represent people's interests.

- Putting an educational qualification would go against the spirit of democracy because it would deprive a majority of the citizens right to contest elections. This is because still majority of the Indian population is uneducated.

Election campaign: Election campaign means the promotion (or propaganda) of the policies, offers and promises that the candidates make to voters to fulfill, if they are elected. In this way, voters can decide the candidate to vote for. They vote for the candidate whose policies they like. In our country, election campaigning takes place for a two-week period between the announcement of the final list of candidates and the date of polling. During this period, the candidates contact their electorate, political leaders, address election meetings and political parties mobilize their supporters. This is also the period when Print Media and television news are full of election-related stories and debates. The election campaign is not limited to these two weeks only. Political parties start preparing for elections months before they actually take place. They prepare their election manifestos. In election campaigns, political parties try to focus public attention on some big issues. They want to attract the public to that issue and get them to vote for their party on that basis.

Slogans Given by Different Political Parties: Some of the successful slogans given by different political parties in various elections are given below

- The Congress party led by Indira Gandhi gave the slogan of 'Garibi Hatao' (Remove poverty) in the Lok Sabha elections of 1971. The party promised to reorient all the policies of the government to remove poverty from the country.
- 'Save Democracy' was the slogan given by Janata Party





in the next Lok Sabha election held in 1977. The party promised to undo the excesses committed during Emergency and restore civil liberties.

- The Left Front used the slogan of 'Land to the Tiller' in the West Bengal Assembly elections held in 1977.
- 'Protect the Self-Respect of the Telugus' was the slogan used by N.T. Rama Rao, the leader of the Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections in 1983.

Code of Conduct and Laws: To regulate election campaign, there are some election laws. According to these laws, no party or candidate can bribe or threaten voters, appeal to them in the name of caste or religion, use government resources for election campaign and spend more than Rs. 25 lakh in a constituency for a Lok Sabha election or Rs. 10 lakh in a constituency in an Assembly Election.

If any party or candidate is found practising any of the above, their election can be rejected by the court even after they have won the election. In addition to the laws, all the political parties in our country have agreed to a Model code of conduct for election campaign. According to this, no party or candidate can use any place of worship for election propaganda, use government vehicles, aircrafts and officials for elections, once elections are announced, ministers shall not lay foundation stones of any project, take any big policy decision or make promise of providing public facilities.

Polling: On the day when the voters cast or 'poll' their vote is called an Election Day. Every person whose name is on the voters' list can go to a nearby polling booth and cast his/her vote through a Secret ballot. Once the voter goes inside the booth, the election official identify him,/ her, put a mark on the voter's finger and allow him,/ her to cast his/ her vote. An agent of each candidate is allowed to sit inside the polling booth and ensure that the voting takes place in a fair way. Earlier voting was done by putting a stamp on the ballot paper. A ballot paper is a sheet of paper on which the names of the contesting candidates alongwith party name and symbols are listed. Now Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) are used to record votes. The machine shows the names of the candidates and the party symbols. The voter has to press the button against the name of the candidate, he/she wants to cast his/her vote.

Counting of Votes: Once the polling is over, all the EVMs are sealed and taken to a secure place. A few days later, on a fixed date, all the EVMs are opened and the votes secured by each candidate are counted. The candidate who secures the highest number of votes from a constituency is declared elected. Within a few hours of counting, all the results are declared. In general elections, the counting of votes in all constituencies takes place at the same time, on the same day. Within a few hours of counting, all the results are declared and it becomes clear as who will form the next government. This event is reported by television channels, radio and newspapers.

What Makes Elections in India Democratic: An independent body 'Election Commission' responsible to conduct elections is formulated in the Constitution of India.

Independent Election Commission: In our country, elections are conducted by an independent and very powerful Election Commission (EC). It enjoys the same kind of independence that the judiciary enjoys. The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) is appointed by the President of India. But once





appointed, he is not answerable to even the President or the government.

Powers of Election Commission: Powers enjoyed by the Election Commission are

- It takes decisions on every aspect of conduct and control of elections right from the announcement of elections to the declaration of results.
- It implements the code of conduct and punishes any candidate or party that violates it.
- During the election period, the Election Commission can order the government to follow some guidelines to prevent use and misuse of governmental power to enhance its chances to win elections or to transfer some government officials.
- When on election duty, government officers work under the control of the Election Commission and not the government.
- When election officials come to the opinion that polling was not fair in some booths or even an entire constituency, they order a repoll.

Popular Participation: The participation and enthusiasm of people in election is another criterion to check the quality of elections. If the election process is not free or fair, people will not continue to participate in the exercise. People's participation in election is usually measured by voter turnout figures. Turnout indicates the per cent of eligible voters who actually cast their vote. In India there is greater voter turn out of poor illiterate people as compared to western democracies.

Acceptance of Election Outcome: The outcome of election is the final test of the free and fairness of it. If elections are not free or fair, the outcome always favours the powerful. In such a situation, the ruling parties do not lose elections. Usually, losing party does not accept the outcome of a rigged election. The outcome of India's election speaks for itself

- The ruling parties routinely lose elections in India both at the national and state level. In the US, an incumbent or sitting elected representative rarely loses an election. But in India, about half of the sitting MPs or MLAs lose elections.
- Candidates who are known to have spent a lot of money on buying votes and those with known criminal connection often lose elections.
- Except some disputed elections, the electoral outcomes are usually accepted by the defeated party as 'people's verdict'.

Challenges to Free and Fair Elections:

- Candidates and parties with a lot of money may not be sure of their victory but they do enjoy an unfair advantage over smaller parties and independents.
- Some candidates with criminal records are able to secure party tickets from major parties due to their connections political.
- Some families tend to dominate political parties; a tendency for dynastic rule is very common.
- Elections offer only little choice to ordinary citizens. All the major parties are quite similar to each other both in policies and practice.
- Smaller parties and independent candidates suffer a huge disadvantage compared to bigger parties in term of money power and organizational support. These challenges exist not only in India but also in many established democracies. This is the reason due to which there is demand of reforms in our electoral system by citizens, social activists and organisations.