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ONE NATION ONE ELECTION: A STEP TOWARDS ELECTORAL SYNCHRONISATION

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I will be discussing about the policy of ONE NATION ONE ELECTION which is inherited from the concept of SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS¹.

Elections in our country are held consecutively after the termination of the tenure of the 5 years or on the dissolution of Lok Sabha and State legislatures as per the laws made in their regard. however, they are not held concurrently or simultaneously. But now our central government has initiated the ONE NATION ONE ELECTION policy by introducing the constitutional amendment bills in 2024 in this regard to make the election policies in our country more refined and simplified².

In this article, I will be discussing each and every aspect dealing with the simultaneous elections and ONE NATION ONE ELECTION policy.

MEANING AND HISTORICAL PRESPECTIVE OF ELECTIONS IN INDIA

‘Free and fair elections are the very important pillars of any republic and democratic country.’

• MEANING

Elections can be termed as a process through which individuals choose one of the candidates to take place as their representative or leader. Elections can be held at state, central, departmental or organizational level or as well.

¹ *Simultaneous Elections in India: Historical and Political Context*. Journal of Political Studies, 2024.

² *Constitutional Amendment Bills, 2024: An Overview*. Government of India Publications, 2024.

One may even conduct an election to decide any important matter or policies as well. The key features of elections include **voting, transparency, fairness, and the protection of voter rights.**³

- **HISTORY OF ELECTIONS**

Before the advent of British colonial rule, the concept of elections, as understood in the modern democratic sense, was not prevalent in India. However, India had various systems of governance and decision-making processes that involved consultative assemblies, councils, and systems of representation within different kingdoms, empires, and tribal societies⁴

GOVERNANCE BEFORE BRITISH SYSTEM

- **ANCIENT INDIA**

1. VEDIC PERIOD (1500BCE-500BCE)

Earlier forms of democratic assemblies were found to be in republics (Mahajanpadas) like Vaishali and Mithila⁵.

Such assemblies were in the form of –

SABHA- An assembly consisting of elders, decision makers and scholarly people⁶.

SAMITI- A broader gathering of people even including common people⁷.

However, the leaders were chosen on the merits, valour and wisdom rather than elections⁸.

2. MAURYAN PERIOD (322 TO 185 BCE)

Emperor Ashoka had a council of minister wherein officials were appointed for administrative roles. However, the process was more about appointment rather than voting⁹.

³ Key Features of Democratic Elections. National Election Commission of India, 2022.

⁴ Early Governance Systems in Ancient India. M. D. Gupta, *Historical Journal of Indian Politics*, 2019

⁵ Mahajanapadas: Early Republican States in Ancient India. *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, 2020.

⁶ The Role of Sabhas in Vedic and Post-Vedic India. R. K. Verma, *Indian Historical Review*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2019, pp. 65–78.

⁷ Samiti: The Democratic Assemblies of Early India. A. P. Chandra, *Studies in Indian Democracy*, 2018

⁸ Leadership Selection in Early Indian Republics. *The Indian Political Science Journal*, 2021.

⁹ Ashoka's Administration: A Historical Overview. S. K. Gupta, *Mauryan Studies Quarterly*, 2017

Further, Tribes like the **Gond, Mizo, and Naga** had councils where leaders were chosen based on consensus and leadership qualities¹⁰. Further, in case of Buddhist councils, after the death of Lord Buddha, councils were held to decide on religious matters.¹¹

And in case of Jain councils, Jain monks and scholars held assemblies to discuss religious doctrines and governance in monastic communities¹².

THE MUGHAL ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM AND EARLY BRITISH INFLUENCE

In Mughal era, there were administrative councils such as Diwan-e-Khas, Diwan-e-Aam wherein appointed officials advised the emperor however, there was autocratic monarchy with not democratic system.

However, during British period several reforms were brought to deal with elections in certain ways which basically led to advent of elections.

REFORMS UNDER BRITISH PERIOD

- **INDIAN COUNCILS ACT, 1861**

It was the first attempt to introduce representations in legislative councils.

Further, it led to expansion of legislative councils at both central and provincial levels. It also led to Introduction of nominated members (limited to educated elites, landowners, and professionals).¹³

However, the scope of this act was too limited as limited franchise could vote and no real powers were given to elected members and British officials had real dominance over decision making¹⁴.

- **INDIAN COUNCIL ACT, 1909 (MORLEY MINTO REFORMS)**

¹⁰ *Tribal Governance in Ancient India: The Gond, Mizo, and Naga Systems*. M. D. Rao, *Tribal Studies Journal*, 2020.

¹¹ *The Buddhist Councils: A Historical Perspective*. L. T. Singh, *Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 2016

¹² *Jain Councils and Monastic Governance*. P. J. Patel, *Indian Religious Studies Journal*, 2019.

¹³ C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 45.

¹⁴ David Morris, *The Indian National Congress and the British Government, 1909–1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 112.

Due to growing participations of Indians for constitutional reforms and governance, this act was brought by the Britishers which paved the way for representation of Indians in legislative councils. It led to political awareness among the Indians.¹⁵

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ACT, 1919 (MONTAGO CHELMSFORD REFORMS)

This act brought the concept of diarchy. The act introduced the concept of bicameral legislature which consisted of legislative assembly and legislative council.¹⁶

Further, it expanded the scope of provinces over certain areas like health, agriculture and education. However, still there were certain lacunas or gaps and limited voting rights to certain Indians.

- **GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ACT, 1935**

This act was very comprehensive in nature as compared to all other reforms prior to independence and it gave provinces the autonomy wherein they became self-governing with elected legislatures. Voting rights were expanded but were still limited as there was no universal suffrage.

However, this led to emergence of several provincial parties and regional leaders like Indian National congress, Muslim league and some other parties like Hindu Mahasabha, Communist Party of India¹⁷.

POST INDEPENDENCE ERA

Following independence, India adopted Constitution that incorporated key elements from various global frameworks to uphold democratic principles in the newly formed nation. The Constitution established India as a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic. It also retained several provisions from the Government of India Act of 1935, such as the bicameral legislature, which led to the creation of the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and the Rajya Sabha (Council of States). Additionally, features like universal adult suffrage and the establishment of an independent Election Commission laid the foundation for a democratic electoral system in India.

¹⁵ Barbara D. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 78

¹⁶ Michael Fisher, *The British Empire and the Making of Modern India* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 152.

¹⁷ S. Ray, *The Rise of Indian Nationalism and the Role of Political Parties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 94.

EVOLUTION OF ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN INDIA

FIRST GENERAL ELECTION

India's first general election was held between October 1951 and February 1952, marking a significant milestone in the establishment of democratic governance. Approximately 173 million voters were registered, with universal adult suffrage extended to citizens aged 21 and above. To facilitate the election process, the Representation of the People Acts of 1950 and 1951 were enacted, and the Election Commission of India was established in 1950 under the leadership of Sukumar Sen.

Subsequent reforms enhanced the electoral framework, including the reduction of the voting age to 18 through the 61st Constitutional Amendment in 1989, the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), and the implementation of local body elections through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. These developments contributed to a more inclusive and efficient electoral system.

SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS – MERITS AND CHALLENGES

• SIMULTANEOUS VOTING SYSTEM

It refers to the synchronization of elections of Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies i.e. holding multiple elections on same day¹⁸. The concept of ONE NATION ONE ELECTION emerges from the concept simultaneous elections itself wherein the voters will cast their vote for elections of Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies on a single designated day.¹⁹

• MERITS AND CHALLENGES OF SIMULTANEOUS VOTING

1. MERITS

The key merits of holding simultaneous elections may involve:

Cost Efficiency²⁰: The overall expenses associated with conducting and managing elections can be significantly reduced.

¹⁸ Bhagat, Chetan. "One Nation, One Election: A Game-Changer?" *Times of India*, 15 Jan. 2023.

¹⁹ Simultaneous Elections: Pros and Cons." *Economic Times*, 25 Feb. 2023.

²⁰ Cost of Elections in India." *Indian Express*, 5 May 2022.

Increased Voter Participation²¹: Holding elections on a single day may encourage a higher number of voters to come out and vote.

Enhanced Efficiency²²: The Election Commission can save both time and resources through streamlined election processes.

Optimized Manpower Utilization²³: Simultaneous elections minimize redundant efforts by administrative and law enforcement bodies, reducing the need for additional manpower.

Better Policy Making: Moreover, conducting elections together can contribute to effective governance and support more informed policy-making decisions.

2. CHALLENGES

Simultaneous elections pose significant challenges, including administrative complexity and implementation hurdles. They may lead to voter confusion and require substantial resources and specialized training for election officials.

IMPACT ON FEDERALISM AND DEMOCRACY

Simultaneous elections may have both positive as well as negative impact on democracy as it can make the election process more cost efficient as well as time saving²⁴. Election will become more dynamic²⁵. However, there can be some negative effects on democracy as well if the process is not implemented in a well manner like state autonomy may be at risk, power may be centralized at central level which could affect federal structure of India. There may be confusion among voters²⁶ as well.

IMPACT ON VOTER TURNOVER AND POLITICAL AWARENESS

The concept of simultaneous elections can positively impact voter participation and political awareness. A unified election schedule may lead to higher voter turnout by reducing confusion and logistical challenges associated with multiple polling dates. Additionally, a single, coordinated campaign can enhance public engagement and minimize voter fatigue caused by frequent elections, thereby sustaining civic interest and awareness.

²¹ Voter Turnout in Simultaneous Elections." *The Hindu*, 10 Mar. 2023.

²² Election Efficiency." *Outlook India*, 15 Oct. 2022.

²³ Challenges in Election Management." *Scroll.in*, 20 Aug. 2023.

²⁴ "Impact of Simultaneous Elections on Cost Efficiency." *Economic Times*, 12 Apr. 2023.

²⁵ "Dynamic Electoral Processes." *Indian Express*, 18 Jan. 2023.

²⁶ "Confusion Among Voters." *India Today*, 27 Feb. 2024.

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

Technology will play a vital role in implementing simultaneous elections by enhancing transparency, efficiency, and security. While Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) are already in use, improvements such as timely online voter registration and periodic audits are essential. Additionally, increasing awareness about voter ID registration among youth through digital platforms can further strengthen the electoral process.

The process of granting voting cards should also be improved and should be made more accessible²⁷. Further, there should be digital electoral rolls. There should be proper monitoring²⁸ system as well.

GLOBAL CASE STUDIES ON SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

COUNTRY	ELECTION APPROACH	BENEFITS	CHALLENGES
India	Separate elections according to the tenure. Recently proposed “ONE NATION ONE ELECTION”	The approach may be time saving, cost effective and more efficient.	Need extensive constitutional amendment and robust logistic planning.
United states	Occasional alignment of federal and state elections.	Less voting fatigue, more efficiency and streamlined governance.	Complex in nature due to less synchronisation across states due to federal nature.
South Africa	concurrent provincial and national elections along with municipal	Better administrative governance and simplified voting process	Regional disparity in resource allocation.

²⁷ "Improving Accessibility of Voting Cards." *The Hindu*, 5 Apr. 2024.
²⁸ "Digital Electoral Rolls and Monitoring Systems." *Times of India*, 18 Dec. 2023.

	elections 2 year thereafter.		
Germany	Concurrent bundestag and state elections.	Smooth and simplified election and cost effective.	Difficult to balance and federal and state governance.
Sweden	Election is based on proportional representation system.	Citizens have direct impact on decision making thereby maintaining democracy.	Comprehensive and quite complex.

ONE NATION ONE ELECTION: LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

Voting system in India has gone through various changes like first ballot papers were used and now EVMs have taken their place²⁹. The voting is done on a particular designated day after the expiry of the tenure or dissolutions of the legislatures.

• KEY AMENDMENTS PROPOSED BY THE BILLS

ONE NATION ONE ELECTION has been initiated by our government by proposing two constitutional amendment bills, namely, ***ONE NATION ONE ELECTION 129th constitutional amendment bill of 2024*** and the ***UNION TERRITORIES Laws amendment bill of 2024*** in the Lok Sabha. In India, the simultaneous election of Lok Sabha and State assemblies were held between 1951 to 1967. And now, the government wants to officially initiate this policy.

Here, are the keys changes that will be made in the constitution of India which are proposed by the high- level committee chaired by former president Mr. Ram Nath Kovind:

ASPECT	CURRENT PROVISIONS	KEY CHANGES PROPOSED
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²⁹ "History of Voting Systems in India." *Economic Times*, 20 Jan. 2023.

Election cycle	Currently, synchronization of elections is not provided by any particular article.	Article 82A CLAUSE 1 TO 6 are proposed to provide for synchronization of the elections particularly under article 82A clause 3.
Tenure Of Elections	Article 83 for Lok Sabha and 172 for State Assemblies provide tenure of elections	Amendment will be made to provide fixed tenure for simultaneous elections.
Dissolution	Article 85 and 174 provides for dissolution oh houses by president and governor.	Proposal to align the dissolution of timeline across Lok Sabha and State Assemblies
Role of Election Commission	Article 324 provides for election commission of India.	Expansion of power in management of simultaneous elections.
Article 327	It deals with power of parliament to make provision with respect to elections in legislatures.	Expansion of parliament's power by including conduct of simultaneous elections after delimitation of constituencies

However, the bill excluded local bodies and municipalities.

ONE NATION ONE ELECTION: A STEP TOWARDS POLITICAL STABILITY?

The policy of one nation one election can be helpful in creating political stability if implemented well. This approach can lead to a holistic development of our nation as it can be helpful in creating better governance, it is cost efficient, it can lead to higher voting rate, it can be helpful in generating voting and election awareness among the citizens. If implemented in a better way by overcoming all the lacunas it can also lead to reduced central-state conflicts and more development of nation.

PUBLIC OPINION AND CIVIL SOCIETY ON ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION

Lately, citizens are becoming more vocal regarding new changes brought by the administrative authorities and thereby having several kinds of opinions. Following are few positive approach and negative approaches in regard to One Nation One Election scheme:

- **POSITIVE APPROACH**

1. Better efficiency
2. Better governance
3. Cost efficient
4. Time saving
5. More awareness among citizens with respect to elections
6. Higher voting turnouts

- **NEGATIVE APPROACH**

1. Conflict may arise between center and state if the policy is not implemented well.
2. Risk on state autonomy
3. Federalism concerns
4. Logistic complexity
5. Administrative and security challenges
6. Marginalized regional parties may be sidelined.

ONE NATION ONE ELECTION: EXPENDITURE AND TRANSPARENCY CONCERNS

1. FISCAL PRUDENCE IN ONE NATION ONE ELECTION

This policy can lead to a strong economic reform as by holding single election, cost of election related activities including logistics, security, administrative, management, implementation and campaigns related activities can be reduced and thereby redirecting funds towards development of nation and promoting economic boost. It will also bring a stability to resource allocation.

2. TRANSPERANCY CONCERNS IN SYNCHRONISING ELECTIONS

There may be various concerns like lack of state autonomy, representation risk and it may quite difficult to implement this policy in a way to avoid the breach of democratic integrity.

CONCLUSION

This policy can be proved to be quite vital in implemented well towards the development of nation due to its efficiency and cost- effective nature. However, there is also a need to maintain balance between the union and state in order to avoid conflict and breach of basic features of constitution of India.