

Lok Sabha Elections and Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru

Abstract

The History of Parliamentary Elections in India, the Lok Sabha election is not as old as the elections of the British House of Commons. The system of elections, under which people exercise their power of governance through representatives directly elected by them for the Lok Sabha, is a recent growth in free India. On January 26, 1950, India became a Sovereign Democratic Republic, and the first general elections to the Lok Sabha, a historical event in India, were held in 1951-1952.

Keywords: Parliamentary Elections in India, Lok Sabha, Democracy, People, General Elections.

Introduction

Evidently, periodic election is the soul of Parliamentary democracy and democratic process, and that is why it is indispensable for the successful working of parliamentary government. Elections and democracy are rightly regarded as the two sides of the same coin. Undoubtedly, elections and modern parliamentary democracy are complementary to each other. P.C. Baral opined, quotes R. Ali, that the former tends substance, vitality and viability to the latter and the latter is the *raison d'etre* of the former.¹ Elections indicate the tone and directions of political system and provide insights into the basic nature and actual functions of the system as a whole.² They are the "nodal points, traumatic experiences of political consciousness." Elections are held for securing political power and putting "a democratic stamp of legitimacy on the regime."³ Organised as they are, on the basis of free choice and universal adult suffrage, in accordance with the generally accepted political principle- Benthamite Principle- of 'one man one vote', elections provide the people an opportunity to assess the performance and conduct of the Party in power. Thus, with popular participation, and popular control, popular sovereignty gets reinforced and its importance reiterated through the device of election. No doubt, election is an attribute as well as the sentinel of democracy. But the efficiency of election itself very much depends on the nature of electoral system, the manner of electoral process, the quality of the electorate and the political perception, besides electoral behavior of the electors. A praiseworthy electoral system generative of free and fair electoral process is the bedrock of genuine parliamentary system of governance in which the verdict of the people would find full expression.⁴

In the modern parliamentary democracy, free and fair elections create a sentiment of popular consent and participation in public affairs, although the government and administration are so complex that it is beyond the direct perception and understanding of the ordinary people. Further, elections pave the way for orderly succession in government by peaceful transfer of power and authority to newly elected rulers.⁵ In parliamentary democracy, people have the privilege of being governed by a government of their own choice. People choose their representatives through elections which are the normal features of popular democracies all over the world. Elections are the life-breath of democratic polity and lie in the centre of the heart of democratic process. They express popular will of the electors. It is through elections the notions of consent and responsibility are translated into reality by conversion of votes cast into the seats in the House. Elections not only sustain democracy, but keep it alive too. Today, democracy implies not government by the people, but effective control over government by the people.⁶

While emphasising the role and importance of elections in the successful functioning of democracy, Professor D.N. Pathak said : "In the institutional framework of democracy, the holding of election plays a pivotal role. Election serves in the first place the very important purpose of finding out the peoples' mind, attitudes and opinions, and their general verdict on

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the performance of the government. Election also serves to impose a certain discipline especially on the political parties to organise themselves, articulate and clarify their ideological stance, programmatic projection and above all, their image so as to be able to create a lasting impression on the minds of the people. Election cuts every party to its size. Past performance of every party comes out in public view.⁷

The credibility of the whole electoral exercise- the electoral process and machinery, the fairness of poll process with an atmosphere free from violence and malpractices- are the essential features of a democracy in action. The point of democracy, after all is to make people politically equal and through the process of elections, select government of their choice and ultimately select their policies. Through the principle of universal adult franchise, democracy seeks equal participation of the people not only in elections, but in working of democracy in practice. While talking about democracy, James Madison has rightly observed : "Who are to be electors of the representatives? Not rich more than the poor; not the learned more than the ignorant; not the haughty heirs of distinguished names more than the humble sons of obscure and unpropitious fortune. The electors are to be the great body of people."⁸

The Constitution of India vests sovereignty in the 'people of India' and it is exercised through their elected representatives to Parliament and State Assemblies. Thus, the democratic structure of the Constitution is maintained through elections to the Legislature. The people of India have the privilege of being governed by the Laws enacted with the consent of their elected representatives.⁹

At the Centre, the President and the two Houses known as the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha constitute Parliament. The Rajya Sabha consists of 245 members. Of these, 233 represent States and union territories and 12 members are nominated by the President. Elections to the Rajya Sabha are indirect; members are elected by the elected members of Legislative Assemblies of the concerned states. The Rajya Sabha is not subject to dissolution, one third of its members retire every year. The Lok Sabha is composed of representatives of the people directly elected by them through periodic elections on the basis of universal adult franchise. The elective membership of the Lok Sabha is distributed among states in such a manner that the ratio between the number of seats allotted to each State and the population of the State is, as far as practicable, the same for all states.¹⁰

Allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha, at present, is based on the census of 1971 and will remain to be so based until the figures of the first census taken after the years 2000 become, available.¹¹ So far as the duration of the Lok Sabha is concerned it shall continue for five years, unless sooner dissolved, from the date appointed for its first meeting.¹²

As of today the Lok Sabha consists of 545 seats. Article 331 of the Constitution provides special representation for the Anglo-Indian community, if not adequately represented. The President of India is

empowered to nominate not more than two members of that community to the Lok Sabha.¹³ The Constitution also provides reservation of seats for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes and that only for a temporary period (this period was ten years in the original Constitution which has been extended to sixty years, that is up to January 25, 2010, by subsequent amendments of Article 334).¹⁴

Keeping the two seats reserved for Anglo-Indian community, the 543 seats have been distributed among general, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes.

The adoption of universal adult franchise without any qualification either sex, property, taxation or the like under the provisions of Article 326 of the Constitution was, indeed, a 'bold experiment' in Indian polity, having regard to the vast extent of the country and huge population therein, with a high rate of illiteracy and even political immaturity of common people. The concept of sovereignty, which underlies the declaration in the preamble that the Constitution adopted, enacted and given by 'the people of India' to themselves would have been hallow if the franchise were not extended to the entire adults.¹⁵ The infusion of young blood into the electorate of India has further been widened by the sixty first amendment Act of 1988, through which the voting age has been lowered from 21 to 18 years.¹⁶

The Lok Sabha elections, 1951-52 was the first election in the history of Lok Sabha elections in India. It was a glaring event that attracted the attention of various countries. The first three general elections 1951-52, 1957 and 1962 to the Lok Sabha were held at such time when Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru was at the 'helm of affairs'. These elections to the Lok Sabha were adjudged as conducted in the 'perfectly peaceful atmosphere.' The Report of the Election Commission of India on the first general elections (1951-52) is a testimony to it. The Report says:

"88.6 million voters actually cast their vote in perfectly peaceful atmosphere. Infact, in most areas, the cities, towns and villages were almost a festive appearance and there was perfect discipline and good humour all round. No breaches of law and order occurred at any of the polling stations-there were only minor cases of breaches of law and order." It adds that, "When the elections were over the fear expressed previously in some quarters about possible interference in the elections of government servants was proved to have been completely unjustified- in fact there was unanimous praise for the manner in which the government servants had played their difficult and onerous part during the elections."¹⁷

The report of the Election Commission on second general elections (1957) to the Lok Sabha was expressive of satisfaction with regard to successful and peaceful conduct of the elections. The Commission mentioned in the report that, "the unqualified success of the first general elections and the satisfaction they gave to the country at large in general and the political parties in opposition in particular, were a pleasant surprise and the adventure was acknowledged at home and abroad as a remarkable act of faith nobly conceived and efficiently implemented. Public confidence in election machinery

has also grown enormously in the intervening years between the two general elections. This was one of the most important factor, which materially contributed the smoothness and peaceful nature of second general elections.”¹⁸

While appreciating the services rendered by the government servants the report said : “The Commission has the pleasure to record that as in the first general elections, so in the second, all government servants in every part of the country cheerfully went through every hardship. It is a matter for pride that they conducted themselves throughout with exemplary fairness and impartiality.”¹⁹

The report further, said : “The Commission gratefully acknowledges the full co-operation extended by all Political Parties in the maintenance of law and order during the poll and generally for successful conduct of the elections in every state.....The second general election constituted an important milestone on the path of democracy in India, the high standards set up in first general elections were fully maintained and it can perhaps now be legitimately claimed that free and fair elections have come to stay and become the tradition of Indian Political life.”²⁰

While reporting with pride, satisfaction and appreciation on the third general elections (1962), the Election Commission said: “The fact that the elections were brought to a successful conclusion without any serious hitch anywhere is sufficient testimony not only to the political stability of India and the efficiency of its administration but even more significantly to the faith it has in parliamentary democracy and free elections. It was remarkable, as well as fortunate, that there was not even a single instance of an adjournment of poll under section 57 of the Act on the ground that the poll was interrupted by riot or open violence.”²¹

Viewing the reports of the Election Commission on the first three general elections, it is evident that all the three elections held during the regime of the Prime Minister Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, were conducted in peaceful atmosphere. The whole electoral exercises in these elections were beyond questioning, besides commendable maintenance of Law and order. It was the Fourth general elections (1967), with which decline in standards started, casting ominously a shadow, upon the faith, confidence and optimism created by the earlier three elections.

The Lok Sabha Elections (1951-52)

India became a ‘Sovereign Democratic Republic’ after the Constitution was adopted with effect from January 26, 1950. In April 1950, the Constituent Assembly- the then interim Parliament had passed the Election Law that paved the way for first general elections in the history of Parliamentary Elections in India. Mr. Sukumar Sen was the Chief Election Commissioner. The first general elections to the Lok Sabha were held along with the elections of Legislative Assemblies in the country on the basis of universal adult franchise and the poll was spread over a period of three months, from December 10, 1951 to February 20, 1952. Free India had emerged as the largest democracy of the world with 173 million voters made eligible for adult franchise. The conduct of first general election was a mammoth exercise with

1,96,089 polling booths to record votes of 489 candidates for the Lok Sabha and 3283 candidates for the state assemblies. In all, 1874 candidates for the Lok Sabha and 15000 candidates for the assemblies were in the fray. The Election Commission gave recognition to only 14 parties as National Party, but more that 70 political parties that included many small as well as Regional Parties and Independents were in the field of this gigantic exercise.²²

Bearing in mind the illiteracy of large number of voters having no experience of the electoral process, the voting method was made very simple. A simplified system was employed for casting of votes. The Election Symbols of the parties and the candidates were pasted on the ballot-boxes and the voter had to insert ballot paper in the ballot box of the candidate of his choice.²³ The voters came to the polling station to cast their votes, attired in gala dresses, men and women, on foot, on bullock carts, camels and elephants, on bicycles and by almost every conceivable means of transportation. The turnout of voters was impressive. Despite geographical hazards and difficulties of climate the voters braved the weather and distance.²⁴

Out of 173 million voters eligible, 88.6 million cast their votes and the overall voting percentage was 46 per cent (45.67%).²⁵ In this election, illiteracy and lack of experience of eligible voters resulted in invalidating the vote. “As many as 1,635,000 votes were invalidated. Inevitably there was some misunderstanding and confusion. The voters had to cast votes simultaneously for the state assembly and the House of the People. In a double-member constituency two votes had to be cast in each instance instead of one. Many voters, for lack of experience and literacy, left their ballots on the top of the ballot boxes, or on the floor of the booth instead of dropping them in ballot boxes.”²⁶

Indian National Congress, a party which was associated with Independence Movement, bagged 364 seats out of 489 for which elections were held in 1951-52 for the Lok Sabha. The Congress had secured 45 per cent of the total vote cast and managed to bag 74.5 per cent of the Lok Sabha seats. Among the other major parties, besides good performance by the Congress, Communist party bagged 16 seats, managing to secure 3.3 per cent of the total vote cast; the Socialists secured 12 seats and the total percentage of vote in their favor was 10.6 per cent. The Kisan Majdoor Praja Party securing 9 seats had bagged 5.8 per cent of the total vote cast; The Bharatiya Jan Sangh got 3 seats and the percentage of vote cast in its favor was 3.1 per cent. The other parties and Independents managed to win 85seats. The other parties got 44 seats managing to secure 16.4 per cent of the total vote cast; whereas Independents won 41 seats and the percentage of the total vote cast in their favour was 15.9 per cent. The Communist party had emerged the largest party in opposition in the Lok Sabha.²⁷

The poll in the general elections (1951-52) was orderly and peaceful. The election clashes were unknown, barring few minor incidents at some polling stations in the States of Vindhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, Bombay, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Some minor administrative irregularities were also noticed. Some 1250 cases of electoral offences like disorderly conduct of election meetings, illegal hiring of vehicles and the like were reported, but this number was negligible in the background of large size of electorate and vast area of constituencies.²⁸

In the first general elections to the Lok Sabha, the electorate were almost sentimentally attached with the Indian National Congress, for it was the prime political organisation that led effectively the freedom struggle of the country and fulfilled the aspirations the people. All the renowned leaders of the time were in Indian National Congress and above all Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru enabled the party to secure 74.5 per cent seats to the Lok Sabha in the first general elections. The Congress formed its government at the Centre and Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, who belonged to Uttar Pradesh sown in as Prime Minister.

The Lok Sabha Elections - 1957

After the reorganisation of States in 1956, the second General Elections to the Lok Sabha were held in 1957. The first Lok Sabha was dissolved earlier to its tenure. The polls to the new Lok Sabha was started from February 24, 1957 and completed in a short period of 17 days. The election was better organised even through the electorate had increased to 193 million where as in the elections of 1952 it was 173 million. The Election Commission, keeping in view the increased number of electorate, to cater the need of voters and in the interest of smooth conduct of election process, setup 2,20,478 polling booths in the country. 1560 candidates for the Lok Sabha and around 14000 candidates for the State Assemblies were in the fray. The Election Commission of India gave recognition to four national parties and 19 political parties at the state level. Over 40 political parties contested second General Elections.²⁹

The polling was by and large peaceful and orderly. The administrative irregularities were also reduced. There were 70 cases of interchange of ballot boxes, besides 265 cases of inter change of ballot papers. The number of electoral offences was only 1000 compared to 1250 in the previous general elections (1951-52).³⁰

The counting of ballot papers in some constituencies had to be staggered due to paucity of staff. Priority in counting was accorded to the constituencies where prominent party leaders were fighting the electoral battle. Such action invited complains and dissatisfaction, and was expressed inside and outside Parliament as well as in the Press. There was no plausible explanation for according priority in counting to the constituencies of prominent leaders. The counting of ballot papers in large number of constituencies was dilatory due to their vast size, non availability of adequate means of communications, beside inexperienced administrative staff.³¹

The overall percentage of vote cast was 47.7 per cent. The political complexion of the Lok Sabha remained unchanged as the Indian National Congress captured 371 out of 494 Lok Sabha seats, securing 47.8 per cent of the total votes cast for the Lok Sabha election. The Bharatiya Jan Sangh got 4 seats and secured 5.9 per cent of the total votes cast; Praja

Socialist Party 19 seats; Communist party of India 27 seats, and other parties³¹ seats securing 10.5 and 7.9 per cent of the total votes cast. Forty two independents returned to the Lok Sabha by securing 19.17 per cent of the total votes cast.³² Thus, again Indian National Congress emerged as single largest party and the Lefts as the main opposition party.

The notable feature of the second general elections (1957) was that the Communist Party of India was able to form a government in the State of Kerala. But at the Centre the Indian National Congress formed its government and Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, a representative to the Lok Sabha from Uttar Pradesh, became the Prime Minister again.

The Lok Sabha Elections - 1962

The third general elections to the Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies was spread over a period of ten days, from February 16, 1962 to February 25, 1962. The number of electorate had now increased to over 216 million. In January, 1961 the two member constituency system was abolished and in the third general elections 1962, the country was divided into single member constituencies, some of them being reserved for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes.³³

For the first time, in the third general elections the ballot marking system was introduced. A common ballot box was provided at each polling booth, unlike the two general elections of 1952 and 1957 when each candidate had separate ballot box. Now the elector inserted his ballot paper in the ballot box or boxes after marking on or near the symbol of the candidate of his choice.

1979, candidates contested the elections for 494 Lok Sabha seats where as 1560 candidates were in the fray of the Lok Sabha elections-1957. 14900 candidates contested for the Assembly seats. Four National parties and 15 state level Parties participated in the elections. The turnout of voters was 55.7. The Indian National Congress secured 361 seats as against 371 seats in 1957 and 364 seats in 1951-52 Lok Sabha elections. It secured 44.7 per cent of the total votes cast. The Communist Party of India improved its share in seats by winning 29 seats and secured 10 per cent of the total votes polled and emerged as the main opposition party. The Bharatiya Jan Sangh also increased its strength in the Lok Sabha by obtaining 14 seats as against 3 and 4 in 1952 and 1957. The Party secured 6.4 per cent of the total votes cost. The Swatantra Party got 22 seats with a percentage of 8.2 of the total votes polled. Praja Samajwadi party bagged 12 seats; Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam 7 seats, Socialists 6 seats, securing 6.8, 2.0 and 2.7 percent of the total votes cast respectively. Other parties got 19 seats obtaining 6.7 per cent of the total votes polled. Independents returned back to the House by bagging 24 seats. They secured 12.5 per cent of the total votes cast.³⁴

The poll was generally peaceful and no untoward incident was reported from any constituency of the country. However, there were few administrative lapses, two from the state of Uttar Pradesh and three from Bihar. In Uttar Pradesh repoll had to be ordered at two polling stations of Phulpur constituency, where Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru was a contestant. At these two polling stations poll could not

be held on account of interchange of copies of the electoral rolls. The three irregularities committed in Bihar did not materially affect the election result. Poll was not adjourned at any polling station of the constituencies on the ground of rioting or breach of peace or violence.³⁵

Aim of the Study

He first three Lok Sabha Elections 1951 – 52, 1957 and 1962 to the Lok Sabha where held at such time when Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru was at the 'helm of affairs'. These three general elections held during the regime of the Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru.

Conclusion

The people of India looked upon Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru as the symbol of freedom struggle. He was considered a National Hero and demigod in the eyes of masses. The Indian National Congress contested first three general elections under the undisputed able leadership of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and secured two third majority in the Lok Sabha, besides managed to form government in most of the States with a few exceptions. None can deny that it was Nehru's personality and Charisma which attracted the people.³⁶

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11. Clause (3) of Article 81 and Article 82, the Constitution of India.
12. Article 83, the Constitution of India.
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14. "The period of ten years prescribed in the original Constitution was extended to twenty years by the Constitution (8th Amendment) Act, 1959, and, then, to thirty years, by the Constitution (23rd Amendment) Act 1969 on the ground that the object of the safe-guard had not yet been fulfilled. This has further been extended to forty years, by the Constitution (45th Amendment) Act 1980, to fifty years by the Constitution (62nd Amendment) Act 1989, w.e.f. 20.12.1989 and to sixty years by the Constitution (79th. Amendment) Act 1999, w.e.f. 25.01.2000 (Article 334)." - D.D. Basu : Introduction to the Constitution of India, p.- 396.
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