

Chapter-4

Electoral Politics

In the last chapter we saw that in a democracy it is not possible to govern directly. The most common and practical form of democracy in our times is for the people to govern through their representatives. In this chapter we will look at how these representatives are elected. We begin by understanding why elections are necessary and useful in a democracy. In the process of understanding elections, we will try to understand how electoral competition among parties serves the people. To distinguish the democratic elections from the non-democratic ones, we will try to search those basic characteristics on the basis of which an election can be called democratic.

In the rest of the chapter we will try to assess the elections in India. That is, from the drawing of boundaries of different constituencies to the declaration of the results. In the process we will consider whether the elections held in India are free and fair. Towards the end of the chapter we will examine the role of Election Commission in ensuring free and fair elections, and also consider the steps in electoral reforms.

WHY DO WE NEED ELECTIONS

Elections take place regularly in any democracy. We have noted in the last chapter that in more than a hundred countries of the world elections are held to choose people's representatives. The best part is

that elections are held in many countries that are not democratic. The question arises, why do we need elections? Why do the democratic and non-democratic countries feel secure under elections. To consider the importance of elections let us, first, imagine a democracy without elections and consider: is it possible for all the people to sit together everyday and take all the decisions? But this is only possible in a small group or community. This is not possible in any large community. In practicality, neither can we collect the entire community nor can all of us agree on a matter. For the solution of this problem most of the democratic countries rule through the medium of representatives.

Is there a democratic way of selecting representatives without elections? Let us think of a place where representatives are selected on the basis of age and experience or education and knowledge. There could be a difficulty in deciding who is more experienced or knowledgeable. But let us say the people can resolve these difficulties, then such a place does not require elections.

But the question is, can we call it a democracy? How do we find out if the people like their representatives or not? How do we ensure that these representatives rule as per the wishes of the people? How to make sure that those who the people do not like do not remain their representatives? This requires a mechanism by which people can choose their representatives at regular intervals and change them if they wish to do so. This mechanism is called election. Therefore, elections are considered essential in the present times for any representative democracy.

WHAT MAKES AN ELECTION DEMOCRATIC

It is clear that elections can be held in many ways. All democratic countries hold elections. Even most non-democratic countries hold some kinds of elections. How do we distinguish democratic elections from any other elections?

Now let us start with some necessary minimum conditions required for democracy: First, everyone should have the right to vote and every vote should have equal value. Second, there should be something to choose from. Parties and candidates should be free to contest elections and should offer some real choice to the voters.

Third, elections must be held regularly after every few years. Fourth, the candidate preferred by the people should get elected. Fifth, elections should be conducted in a free and fair manner, where people can choose their representatives, according to their wish.

These conditions might look very simple and easy. But there are many countries where the minimum conditions are not fulfilled. Let us apply these conditions to the elections held in our country and try to test whether the elections in our country can be called democratic?

RATIONALISATION OF POLITICAL COMPETITION IN ELECTIONS

By election is meant political competition. This competition can be seen in various forms. The most obvious form is the competition among political parties. At the constituency level it takes the form of competition among several candidates. If there is no competition election will become pointless. Let us consider how much these

competitions are issue-based and person-based? Let us also consider, is it profitable to have political competition? Clearly an electoral competition has many demerits. It creates a sense of disunity and factionalism in every locality. You would have heard of people complaining of party politics dividing their families. Different political parties and leaders often level allegations against one another. They use dirty tricks to win the elections. Some people say that in this competition good politics is sacrificed for the sake of winning elections. The result is that some good people who may wish to serve the country and society through politics are greatly disappointed.

Our constitution makers were aware of these problems. But still they hoped that in future this independent electoral competition will slowly improve with time. There have been some reforms in this direction. But they cannot be called satisfactory.

In such a situation how do we face the realities? One way is to reform and change the character and knowledge of the political leaders, and another practical method is to develop such a system in which the political leaders who serve the people will be rewarded while the ones who do not serve the people will be punished. Who will decide the reward or punishment? It is clear that this is done by the general public. This is the exact meaning of electoral politics. Regular electoral competition provides incentives to political parties and leaders. In the process they know the fact that if they do not show interest in the solution of the problems of the people, then people will not accept them and people will defeat them. Sometimes it also happens that instead of giving importance to general problems they pay attention to personal problems. As a result those political leaders win the elections who believe in making individuals happy and not in a common problem.

It is true that all parties wish to come to power. And just for the sake of pretence they have to serve the people. They are compelled to join this race. Hence, political competition is beneficial not only for elections but also for democracy.

ELECTION SYSTEM IN INDIA

We have come to know that India is a democratic country. Here also we have regular elections, which we have seen and heard. Now the point is whether our elections are democratic. To answer this question let us see how are elections held in India. In our country the elections of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha are held every five years. The representatives who are elected have a term of five years. That is to say every five years the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabha are dissolved. Then on a single day or within a small interval on different days elections are held in all constituencies. This is called general elections. Sometimes elections are held in only one constituency where it may have turned vacant on account of death or resignation. This is known as by- elections. Sometimes it also happens that due to not having the majority of votes , some of the governments fail to get confidence in the Lok Sabha or the Vidhan Sabha , then in such in a condition there are mid-term polls , then these mid- term polls turn into general elections. In this chapter we will discuss the general elections.

Constituency

© BSTBPC
WEB COPY - NOT TO BE PUBLISHED

ACTIVITY

In the Ara Lok Sabha constituency, how many Vidhan Sabha constituencies are there?

In which Lok Sabha constituency is Sandesh Vidhan Sabha constituency?

Find out how many constituencies of Vidhan Sabha are there in your Lok Sabha constituency.

In 2005 the people of Bihar elected 243 members of legislative Assembly [M.L.A.]. People from your area must have also made M.L.A.s. Did all the people of Bihar vote to elect 243 M.L.A.s? Perhaps you might be knowing that this does not happen. This does not even seem possible. For the purpose of elections the country is divided into several constituencies depending on the population. These areas are called electoral constituencies. The voters who live in an area elect one representative. Bihar is divided into 243 electoral constituencies to elect M.L.A.s. Similarly for Lok Sabha elections the country is divided into 543 electoral constituencies. The representative elected from each constituency of Lok Sabha is called a member of Parliament or an M.P. One of the features of a democratic election is that every vote should have equal value. That is, the vote of the President of India and a common man is of the equal value. That is why our constitution requires that each constituency should have roughly equal population in ratio with the area living within it.

Similarly, each state is divided into a specific number of Assembly constituencies. In this case the elected representative is called the member of Legislative Assembly or an M.L.A. The parliamentary constituencies are far bigger than the Legislative constituencies. We can also say that each parliamentary constituency has within it several Assembly constituencies.

The same principle applies Panchayat and Municipal elections. That is to say that even these have been divided into smaller electoral constituencies. The similarity in nomenclature may not cause any

confusion, hence they are called wards. Each ward elects one representative who is called a ward commissioner. In common language these constituencies are called seats, because each constituency represents one seat in the Assembly.

RESERVED CONSTITUENCIES :

Our constitution entitles every citizen to elect its representative. The constitution makers were, however, worried that in an open electoral competition, certain weaker sections may not stand a good chance to get elected to the Lok Sabha and the state Legislative Assemblies. They may not have the required resources to win and contest the elections against others. It is also possible that those who are influential and resourceful may prevent them from winning elections. If that happens, our parliament and Assemblies would be deprived of the voice of a significant section of our population. And that would make our democracy less representative and less democratic.

So, the makers of our constitution thought of a specific system of reserved constituencies for the weaker sections. Hence, some constituencies of the Lok Sabha are reserved for the people of schedule castes [SC] and scheduled tribes [ST]. In a SC reserved constituency only someone who belongs to the scheduled caste can stand for election. Similarly, only those belonging to the scheduled tribes can contest an election from a constituency reserved for ST. Currently in the Lok Sabha, 79 seats are reserved for the ST. After the making of Jharkhand there is little population of ST in Bihar, hence, there is no seat reserved for the ST in Bihar. Only women can contest for seats

reserved for women. For the seats of General and Backward Classes only women of that group can contest.

- √ Can other states , like Bihar , can reserve half of the seats for women?
- √ Can one third seats be reserved for women in Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha?


Voter's list



Once the constituencies are decided the next step is to decide who can and who cannot vote. In a democratic election, the list of those who are eligible to vote is prepared much before the election and given to everyone. This list is officially called Electoral Roll and is commonly known as the voter's list. The preparation of the voter's list is an important work. Without it elections are not possible. In the last chapter we have read about the principle of universal adult franchise. In practise it means everybody has the right to vote and each vote should have equal value. No one should be denied the right to vote without a good reason. In India all citizens 18 and above are considered to be adults.

On the basis of being an adult they have the right to vote. In adult franchise every adult has the right to vote regardless of caste, religion, community, rich, poor, or education. Only the age of 18 and above is seen. There is a provision in our constitution to deny voting rights to criminals, and persons with unsound minds. It is the responsibility of the government to get the names of eligible voters put on the voter list. As

new persons attain voting age names are added to the voters list. Names of those who have died or who have moved out are deleted. In that situation a revision of the list takes place every five years. It is the responsibility of the government to get it done.

In the last few years in the elections a photo identity card has been introduced. The government has tried to give this card to every person on the voter list. The voters are required to carry this card so that no body may be debarred from voting and no one can vote for someone else. Now the process of getting the photo embossed on the voter's list is in progress. It is true that all the voters have not yet received their photo identity cards. That is why the election commission has given validity to 14 other identity cards for the purpose of voting, for example, voter's ration card, electricity bill, driving license etc.


ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA
IDENTITY CARD
 भारत निर्वाचन आयोग
 पहचान पत्र
 BR/36/214/144176

Elector's Name : SARSWATI DEVI
 निर्वाचक का नाम : सरस्वती देवी
 Father/Mother/Husband's Name : ALAKH NARAYAN SINGH
 पिता/माता/पति का नाम : अलखनारायण सिंह
 Sex / लिंग : Female / स्त्री
 Age as on 1.1.1994 : 51 Years
 १.१.१९९४ को आयु : 51 वर्ष

Address : H.NO. 62A,
 WARD NO. 20,
 MAHENDRU, DISTT. PATNA
 पता : म.सं. 62क,
 वार्ड नं. 20,
 महेंद्र, जिला पटना

Facsimile Signature of
 Electoral Registration Officer
 for 207-PATNA CENTRAL Constituency
 207-पटना केन्द्रीय निर्वाचन क्षेत्र
 के निर्वाचक रजिस्ट्रीकरण अधिकारी
 के हस्ताक्षर की अनुकृति

Place : PATNA SADAR Date : 26.03.95
 स्थान : पटना सदर दिनांक : 26.03.95

This card may be used as an Identity Card
 under different Government Schemes.
 इस पत्र को विभिन्न सरकारी योजनाओं के अन्तर्गत
 पहचान पत्र के रूप में प्रयोग किया जा सकता है।

SAMPLE OF PHOTO IDENTITY CARD

THE FIRST PAGE OF ELECTORAL ROLL

निर्वाचक नामावली, 2014 (S04) बिहार

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|------------------|-------------|--------|-------|-------------------|------|-----------|-------------|-------|--------|-------------------|------|-----------|--------|-----------|---------|-----------|------|--------|---------|----------|
| विधान सभा क्षेत्र की संख्या, नाम व आरक्षण स्थिति : | | 190 -पालीगंज - सामान्य | भाग संख्या : 234 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| लोक सभा क्षेत्र की संख्या, नाम व आरक्षण स्थिति : | | 31 -पाटलिपुत्र-सामान्य | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1.पुनरीक्षण का विवरण : | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| पुनरीक्षण का वर्ष | : 2014 | निर्वाचक नामावली की पहचान : विशेष संश्लिप्त पुनरीक्षण, 2013 के अन्तर्गत अंतिम रूप से प्रकाशित तथा उसके पश्चात मतत अद्यतीकरण के अनुपूरक के साथ एकीकृत एवं समेकित मूल निर्वाचक सूची | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| अर्हता की तिथि | : 01.01.2014 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| पुनरीक्षण का स्वरूप | : विशेष संश्लिप्त पुनरीक्षण, 2014 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| प्रकाशन की तिथि | : 02.09.2013 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2.भाग व मतदान क्षेत्र का विवरण : | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| भाग में आनेवाले प्रभागों की संख्या व नाम : (1) कटका | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td>मुख्य ग्राम</td> <td>: कटका</td> </tr> <tr> <td>डाकघर</td> <td>: शंकरपुर इमामगंज</td> </tr> <tr> <td>थाना</td> <td>: पालीगंज</td> </tr> <tr> <td>राजस्व हलका</td> <td>: 009</td> </tr> <tr> <td>पंचायत</td> <td>: कटका पैगम्बरपुर</td> </tr> <tr> <td>अंचल</td> <td>: पालीगंज</td> </tr> <tr> <td>प्रखंड</td> <td>: पालीगंज</td> </tr> <tr> <td>अनुमंडल</td> <td>: पालीगंज</td> </tr> <tr> <td>जिला</td> <td>: पटना</td> </tr> <tr> <td>पिन कोड</td> <td>: 804426</td> </tr> </table> | | | | मुख्य ग्राम | : कटका | डाकघर | : शंकरपुर इमामगंज | थाना | : पालीगंज | राजस्व हलका | : 009 | पंचायत | : कटका पैगम्बरपुर | अंचल | : पालीगंज | प्रखंड | : पालीगंज | अनुमंडल | : पालीगंज | जिला | : पटना | पिन कोड | : 804426 |
| मुख्य ग्राम | : कटका | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| डाकघर | : शंकरपुर इमामगंज | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| थाना | : पालीगंज | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| राजस्व हलका | : 009 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| पंचायत | : कटका पैगम्बरपुर | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| अंचल | : पालीगंज | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| प्रखंड | : पालीगंज | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| अनुमंडल | : पालीगंज | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| जिला | : पटना | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| पिन कोड | : 804426 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3.मतदान केन्द्र का विवरण : | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| मतदान केन्द्र की संख्या व नाम : | 234 उर्दू मध्य विद्यालय, करिमपुर कटका | मतदान केन्द्र की विशेष हैसियत : | सामान्य | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| मतदान केन्द्र का भवन व पता | उर्दू मध्य विद्यालय, करिमपुर कटका | इस मतदान क्षेत्र के सहायक (ऑफिशियरी) | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | मतदान केन्द्रों की संख्या : | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4.मतदाताओं की संख्या : | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| आरम्भिक क्रम संख्या | अंतिम क्रम संख्या | मतदाताओं की संख्या | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 821 | पुरुष | महिला | कुल | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 411 | 410 | 821 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES

We have noted above that in a democratic election people should have the facility of choosing an alternative. This happens only when there are almost no restrictions on anyone to contest an election. This is what our election system provides. That is to say any one who can be a voter can also become a candidate in elections. The only difference is that in order to be a candidate the minimum age is 25 years, while it is 18 years for being a voter. There are some limited restrictions on criminals. The limited restrictions are because the criminals escape because of the final judgement of the court.

For elections the political parties declare the names of their candidates, and also their symbols and support. The process of nomination by political parties in common language is known as ticket.

A person who wishes to contest an election has to fill a nomination form and give some money as security deposit. In the recent days a new system of declaration has been introduced on direction from the Supreme Court. Every candidate has to make a legal declaration giving full details of :-

- ◆ Serious criminal cases pending against the candidate;
- ◆ Details of the assets and liabilities of the candidate and his or her family;
- ◆ Educational qualification of the candidate.

QUESTIONS RELATED TO EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR CANDIDATES

- √ Why is there no educational qualification for M.L.A.s, M.P.s and people's representatives when some kind of educational qualification is needed for any other job in the country ?
- √ If educational qualifications become compulsory for these in our country, will it not deprive half of the population of their fundamental rights? Deprived, because half of the population is illiterate.

ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The main purpose of elections is to give a chance to choose their representatives and participate in the making of the government. For this it is essential for the people to know who is a better representative, which party will give a better government, or whose policy is for the sake of welfare. During the election campaign the political parties and voters participate in a free and open discussion.

In our country such campaigns take place for a two week period between the announcement of the final list of candidates and the date of polling . During this period the candidate contact their voters, address

election meeting, and different political parties propagate through newspapers and T.V. channels.

During election campaigns the political parties attract people through charming slogans. In 1971 the Congress party gave the slogan of garibi hatao [remove poverty]. In 1977 Save democracy was the slogan given by Janata party. The slogan of land to the tiller was given in the West Bengal Assembly elections in 1977. In 1988 the slogan of 'Protect the self respect of the Telugus' was given in Andhra Pradesh and in 2000 the slogan of 'Make Jharkhand' was given.

In a democracy it is best to leave political parties and candidates free to conduct their election campaigns the way they want to. But it is necessary to give all parties fair and equal chance to compete. That is why there are some tough provisions prescribed law for election. No party or Candidate can do these works.

- √ Bribe or threaten voters;
- √ Use government resources for election campaign;
- √ Spend more than Rs. 2,50,000 in a constituency for a Lok sabha election or Rs. 1,00,000 in a constituency in an Assembly election.

If any candidate is found guilty of indulging in any of these activities, then his election may be declared rejected. In addition to these laws, all the political parties in our country have agreed to a Model Code of Conduct for election campaigns. According to this no party or candidate can :

- ◆ Use any religion or religious place for election propagation.

- ◆ Use government vehicles, aircrafts, and officials for elections.
- ◆ Once elections are announced, Ministers shall not lay foundation stones of any projects, take any big policy decisions, or make any promises of providing public facilities.

POLLING AND COUNTING OF VOTES.

The final phase of election campaign is polling. The voters cast their votes on the day prescribed by the Election Commission. Along with the date of elections the polling booths are also decided. For this the time limit is also declared beforehand. For a polling booth, any government or a public place or building is selected. To conduct the election on the polling booth the government appoints one presiding officer and other polling officers. Once the voter goes inside the booth, the election officials identify them, put a mark on their finger, and allow them to cast their votes. There are agents from different representatives to identify the voters.

The voters are given a ballot paper on which the names of the contesting candidates along with party names and symbols are listed on which they cast their votes of their choice. Now a days to make voting even more transparent, electronic voting machines [EVM] are being used. The machine shows the names of the candidates and the party symbols. The voter has to just press the button against the name of the candidate they want to vote. Once the polling is over all the ballot boxes are sealed and taken to a secure place fixed by the Election Commission. Then on a fixed and declared date the votes are counted.

The agents of all candidates are present there to ensure that the counting is done properly. The candidate who secures the highest number of votes is declared elected. In the general election, usually the counting of votes in all the constituencies takes place at the same time on the same day. Thus, newspapers and T.V. channels report the entire result of the elections immediately.

IS ELECTION IN INDIA DEMOCRATIC?

After the declaration of election results the newspapers and the T.V. channels report about the use of unfair means in elections in different areas. Some malpractices are discovered by the media itself while some are reported by the political parties. Most of these reports are about the following:

- ◆ Inclusion of false names and exclusion of genuine names in the voter list.
- ◆ Misuse of government facilities and officials by the ruling party.
- ◆ Intimidation of voters and rigging on the voting day.
- ◆ Spread rumours on the eve of election related to caste and religion and distribution of illegal wealth among the voters.

To some extent these reports are correct. It is not only a question of competition among political parties. Very often it is heard that it is very difficult to keep alive a democracy in this country. Then can we say that in India the elections are not democratic? To reply this question we

have to consider if a party win an election and come to power not because it has popular support but through electoral malpractices. In this connection we should also think over the role of people in electoral malpractices, as to how much they are indifferent and how much co-operative they are. Let us carefully examine various aspects of this question.

INDEPENDENT ELECTION COMMISSION

To examine the impartiality of election the Indian constitution has constituted an independent election commission, which is called 'Election Commission of India.' Now the points to be noted are, who conducts the election commission? Are they independent of the government or can the government or the ruling party influence or pressurize them directly or indirectly? Do they have enough powers to be able to conduct free and fair elections? Do they actually use these powers?

The answers to all these questions are quite satisfactory and positive for our country. In our country the election commission is as independent as the judiciary. The chief election commissioner is appointed by the President of India. Once appointed, the Election Commissioner is not answerable to the government or the President and no government can remove the CEC before his/her term.

Very few election commissions in the world have such wide ranging powers as the Election Commission of India. Let us consider its rights:-

The EC takes decisions on every aspect of conduct and control of elections from the announcement of elections to the declaration of results and its decision is final.

Along with this, the EC implements a code of conduct and can make the government and the candidates to follow some guidelines whose violation will be a punishable offence.

During the elections the government is compelled to follow the guidelines of EC. In it are included the use of government machinery to win elections and to transfer some government officials.

When on election duty, government officers work under the control of the EC and not the government.

In the last decade, the role of the intervening power of the EC has given rise to faith of the people. In the election of Bihar 2005, the EC was very active. When election officials come to the opinion that polling was not fair in some booths or even an entire constituency, they order for a re-election which, in common language, is called re-polling.

The EC is involved in the process of electoral reforms and is working out solutions for the problems of people and to control the malpractices. Now, in addition, photo identity card, the photos of the voters will also be in the voter-list. The revision of voter- list and the making of photo identity card is a continuous process.

We can conclude that if the EC in India had not been independent and powerful then definitely the elections would not have been democratic.

THE CIRCULAR ISSUED BY ELECION COMMISSION FOR THE FORMATION OF BIHAR VIDHAN SABHA:

- ◆ Photo identity card compulsory for elections.
- ◆ The EC declared guilty a Minister of the government for the violation of code of conduct.
- ◆ The EC controlled the expenses on elections.
- ◆ EC: ban and censorship on political advertisements.
- ◆ An eye on the hidden expenses of elections by the EC.
- ◆ Honourable court requested the EC to prohibit the criminals from contesting the elections.
- ◆ At the spur of elections, the EC changed the D.M.s and the S.P.s.

Consider these points and find out which powers are being used by the EC for a fair and free election.

Participation of people in election:

Another way to check the quality of the election process is to see whether people participate in it with enthusiasm. 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 voters' turn- out figures. This is correct from the scale of practical view point. From this we get an idea of the actual voting done by eligible voters. Over the last 50 years the turn- out in Europe and North America has declined whereas the turn-out in India has either remained stable or actually gone up.

Very often it is seen that in India the poor, illiterate and underprivileged people vote in larger proportion as compared to the rich and the privileged sections. In America the poor people, Afro-Americans vote much less than the rich and the White people.

The point to consider here is that whether the poor, illiterate and weaker sections have interest in elections in the real sense, and vote. Is this interest to show a participation in government? Do the rich and privileged sections have a natural disinterest towards government?

We should evaluate the participation of people only after finding the answers to these questions.

Let us see the conclusions of the National Election Study 2004 in which the people were asked what difference did their votes make?

Let us see the percentage of election related activities , and the increase in its percentage.

The compulsion to accept election outcomes:

One final test of the free and fair election is its outcome. If elections are not free or fair, the outcome always favours the powerful. But this

does not happen in India. Very often the government in power is defeated. Many sitting M.P.s and M.L.A.s lose elections. The representatives capable of buying votes and those with a criminal background very often lose.

As a conclusion, it is a constitutional compulsion to accept the election results.

CHALLENGES TO FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS:

All these lead to a simple conclusion that elections in India are basically free and fair. We have to accept the fact that the party that wins an election and forms government does so because it has got the support of the people. It is possible that a few candidates may win through unfair means, but the overall verdict of the general election still reflects popular preference.

By this time certain questions arise in our minds which give a different picture of free and fair elections:-

- ◆ Do the voters have correct and healthy alternative on the basis of which they can use their voting right?
- ◆ The candidates with criminal background are able to push others out of the electoral race and secure a ticket from major parties.
- ◆ Some families dominate political parties; tickets are distributed to relatives from these families.

- ◆ Smaller parties and independent candidates suffer a huge disadvantage compared to bigger parties..there may be some other challenges as well.

It is obvious that only the efforts of EC are not sufficient. The alertness and understanding of people is also necessary. Along with the general citizens social activists and organisations will have to think over it seriously. It is true that these challenges are not only faced in India. More or less the situation is the same in almost all democratic countries.

Do you have a solid solution to election reforms? What can an ordinary citizen do to face these challenges?

GLOSSARY

Election Commission of India: an independent unit meant for holding elections in Parliament and Assembly in India, which has been given powers by the constitution of India.

Constituency: voters in a geographical area who elect a representative.

Model Code of Conduct: : A set of norms and guidelines to be followed by political parties and contesting candidates during election time.

Election symbol: The EC allots specific election symbols to recognized parties. the independent candidates do not have any specific symbol but it is different in different constituencies. The symbol indicated against the name of the representative is called Election Symbol.

QUESTIONS

1. Why are elections important? Which of these statements , regarding it, are not true?
 - a. In elections people elect representatives of their choice.
 - b. Elections enable people to judge the performance of the government.
 - c. Elections give an opportunity to fulfil the aspirations of the people.
 - d. Election gets an opportunity to intervene in the working of the judiciary.
2. Which of these is not a good reason to say that Indian elections are democratic?
 - a. India has the largest number of voters in the world.
 - b. In India elections are free and fair.
 - c. In India everyone above the age of 18 has a right to vote.
 - d. In India the losing parties accept the electoral verdict.

3. Match the following:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| A. Universal adult franchise. | (1) Almost equal number of voters in every constituency |
| B. Representation of weaker sections | (2) Right to vote at the age of 18 and above. |
| C. Open political competition | (3) Everyone is independent to form party or contest elections. |
| D. One vote, one value. | (4) Reservation of seats for Scheduled Tribes. |

4. List all the election related activities mentioned in the chapter and arrange them in a serial order from beginning to the end:

Counting of votes, making of voter list, election results, filing nomination, announcing election schedule, releasing election manifestos, election campaign.

5. At the time of election, what roles of EC do you not agree with?
- a. elections on the basis of photo identity card and other prescribed identifications.
 - b. ban on misuse of government machinery in elections.
 - c. the EC should intervene in the selection of candidates by political parties.
 - d. Along with the security of the voters the EC should also give security to the election officials.
6. On the basis of the information gathered from this chapter give two facts to support your statement.
- a. it is easy for the party in power to win in election.
 - b. for a free and fair election the people should participate in it.
 - c. the EC does not have enough powers to hold free and fair elections in the country.
 - d. there is a great participation of people in our country,

7. Shyamlal, in a criminal matter, got the punishment of life imprisonment. Mohanlal has been found guilty of torturing his wife for dowry. The court has not permitted both of them to contest elections. Is this judgment against the basic policies of democratic elections? Give reasons for your answer.
8. Veera Singh and Saifuddin are two representatives who have been imprisoned at the order of court on account of criminal matter. Until the final judgment the EC has to accept them as legal representatives. What should people do in such cases?
- a. Should people make them win the elections and free them from crime?
 - b. Should people not vote them because of their criminal face?
 - c. Should they be allowed to meet people during elections?
 - d.
 1. If yes, is it not a threat to democracy?
 2. If no, then why is he included in the working of the parliament?
 3. If this is a challenge to Indian democracy, then what would you say in this relation?