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Ch: ELECTORAL POLTICS (NOTES)

READ THE PARAGRAPH THROUGHLY AND TRY TO UNDERSTAND.

### System Of Elections In India

In India, Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha (Assembly) elections are held regularly every five years. After five years, the term of all the elected representatives comes to an end. Elections are held in all constituencies at the same time, either on the same day or within a few days. This is known as General Election. Sometimes an election is held only for one constituency to fill the vacancy caused by death or resignation of a member. This is known as a by-election.

### Electoral Constituencies

In India, an area based system of representation is followed where the country is divided into different areas for purpose of elections. These are called Electoral Constituencies. Every voter who lives in an area elect one representative.

For the Lok Sabha election, India is divided into 543 constituencies. The representative elected from each constituency is called Member of Parliament or an MP. One of the features of a democratic election is that every vote has equal value. For Vidhan Sabha election, each state is divided into a specific number of assembly constituencies and the elected representative of each assembly constituency is called the Member of Legislative Assembly or an MLA.

**By-election:** If a representative from a constituency dies while in office or if the office-falls are vacant because of reasons like resignation, fresh elections are held in that particular constituency. Such an election is called a by-election.

Constituency' Voters in a geographical area who elect a representative to the Legislative Bodies.

Each parliamentary constituency has within it several assembly constituencies. The same principle applies for Panchayat and Municipal elections.

Each village or town is divided into different wards that are like constituencies. Each ward elects one member of the village or the urban local body. Sometimes these constituencies are counted as 'seats' and each constituency represents one seat in the assembly.

For example, when we say that 'Lok Dal won 60 seats<sup>1</sup> in Haryana, it means that candidates of Lok Dal won in 60 assembly constituencies in the state and thus Lok Dal had 60 MLAs in the State Assembly.

### **Reserved Constituencies**

The Constitution makers were 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.

If that happens, our Parliament and Assemblies would be deprived of the voice of a significant section of our population. That would make our democracy less representative and less democratic.

### **Reservation for SC and ST**

The makers of our Constitution thought of a special system of reserved constituencies for the weaker sections. Some constituencies are reserved for people who belong to the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST).

In an SC reserved constituency, only someone who belongs to the Scheduled Castes can stand for election.

Similarly, only those belonging to the Scheduled Tribes can contest an election from a constituency reserved for ST.

### **Reservation in Lok Sabha/ District/Local Level**

A few seats in Lok Sabha are reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). This number is in proportion to their share in the total population.

In the year 2012, 84 seats are reserved for the Scheduled Castes and 47 for the Scheduled Tribes (in Lok Sabha).

Thus, the reserved seats for SC and ST do not take away the legitimate share of any other social group. This system of reservation was extended later to other weaker sections at the district and local level. In many states, seats in rural (panchayat) and urban (municipalities and corporations) local bodies are now reserved for Other Backward Classes (OBC) as well.

However, the proportion of seats reserved varies from state to state. Similarly, one-third of the seats are reserved in rural and urban local bodies for women candidates.

### **Voters List**

When 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 the Electoral Roll and is commonly known as the Voters' List.

This is an important step as it is linked to the first condition of a democratic election i.e. everyone should get an equal opportunity to choose representatives. All the citizens are human beings with their own needs and views. That is why all of them deserve to have an equal say in decisions that affect them. Therefore everyone is given the right to vote.

The right to vote falls under Universal Adult Franchise. It means all the citizens aged 18 years and above can vote in an election regardless of his or her caste, religion or gender.

### **Maintaining of Voters' list**

It is the responsibility of the government to get the names of all the eligible voters put on the voters' list. As new persons attain voting age, names are added to the voters' list, names of those who move out of a place or those who are dead are deleted. A complete revision of the list takes place every five years. This is done to ensure that it remains up to date.

**[Note Some criminals and persons with unsound mind can be denied the right to vote, but only in rare situations.]**

### **Election Photo Identify 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' licence or Adhar Card.

### **Nomination Of Candidates**

The system of our country provides almost no restrictions on anyone to contest the 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 the 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 a security deposit.

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

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

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

**Electoral Roll** It is the voters' list prepared by a door to door survey to include only bonafide voters and minimise the role of bogus voters. **Universal Adult Franchise** Every Indian citizen of 18 years and above have the right to vote irrespective of caste, creed and sex.

### **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, the 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 elate of polling.

During this period, the candidates contact their electorate, political leaders, address..election meetings and political parties mobilise 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.

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