

Simultaneous Elections: Need of the Hour and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Simultaneous elections have been conducted for the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies simultaneously in India in 1952, 1957, 1962 and 1967. In 1968-69 this practice was discontinued because some Legislative Assemblies were dissolved earlier due to various reasons. Since then India is trying hard to adopt the old election system but there is no consensus among the political parties. Addressing to NITI Aayog Governing Council's third meeting prime PM Modi pitched for conducting simultaneous election to the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies.

1. Introduction

NITI Aayog defines simultaneous election as "structuring the Indian election cycle in a manner that elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies are synchronised together". In this system a voter casts his vote for electing members for both Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly on a single day and at the same time. Simultaneous elections do not mean that voting across the country for Lok Sabha and State Assembly on a single day and at the same time. This can be conducted in a different phases as per the prevalent practice provided to voters in a particular constituency for both State Assembly and Lok Sabha the same time.

In recent time, a voice in the favour of one nation, one election has been raised from different corners of India. Within 5 year tenure of Lok Sabha, the country witnesses, on an average, 5 to 7 state assembly elections every year. A huge amount is spent to conduct Lok Sabha elections and then equally to Assembly and local body polls. Simultaneous Election would help in reducing massive expenditure. Frequent elections lead to the whole machinery of administration gets engaged in election work which ultimately affects the productivity of other government services. Due to frequent elections government cannot announce any new scheme, new appointment, transfer or posting (without Election Commission approval during this period). Simultaneous Election would help in reducing the policy paralysis that causes due to Model Code of Conduct.

Frequent elections disrupt the normal public life, disruption of road traffic, all the leaders holding posts from ruling party keep themselves busy for months in campaigning across the country while leaving their duties in the hands of bureaucracy. Winning elections become first priority of all politicians. As a result, running an administration and attending to people's grievances take a back seat for politicians and bureaucracy rules the roost. If India would not be in perpetual election mode then obviously such efficient time would let the government to concentrate on policy making.

- Addressing to **NITI Aayog Governing Council's** third meeting prime PM Modi pitched for conducting

simultaneous election to the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies.

- The **Law Commission of India** Chaired by Justice Balbir Singh Chauhan released its draft report on Simultaneous Elections on August 30, 2018. The report examined legal and constitutional questions related to the conduct of simultaneous elections.
- **79th report of the parliamentary standing committee** on Law and Justice recommended a two-phase election schedule – one concurrent with Lok Sabha elections, the second in the mid-term of the Lok Sabha.
- **BJP government in its manifesto in 2014** stated that party will evolve a method to hold Lok Sabha and assembly elections simultaneously.

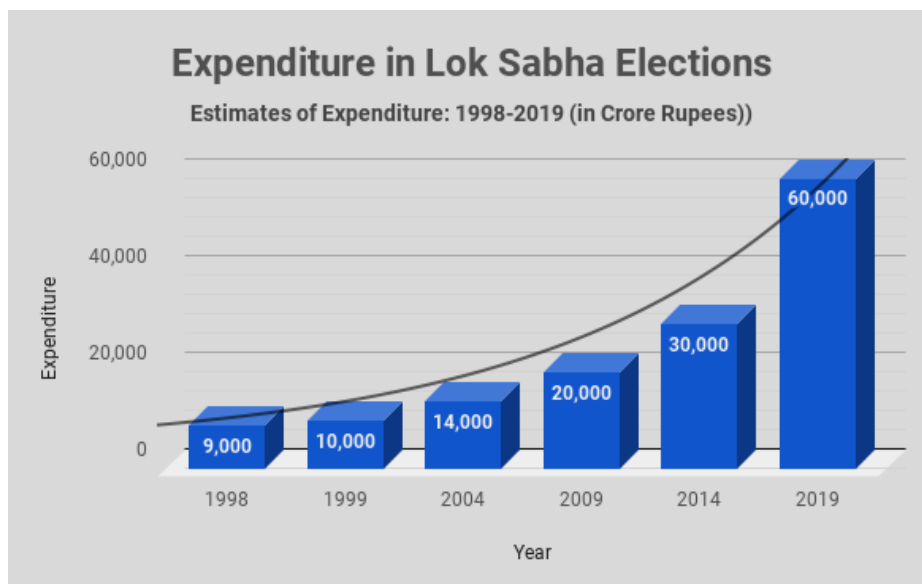
2. History of "One Nation One Election" in India

If someone thinks that the concept of "One Nation One Election" is new for India then it is wrong because "One Nation One Election" is not a unique experiment in our country. Simultaneous elections have been conducted for the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies simultaneously in India in 1952, 1957, 1962 and 1967. In 1968-69 this practice was discontinued because some Legislative Assemblies were dissolved earlier due to various reasons. Since then India is trying hard to adopt the old election system but there is no consensus among the political parties.

Let's discuss the merits and demerits of "One Nation One Election"

3. Merits of "One Nation One Election"

- **Reduction in Cost of Elections:** The cost of an election has two components – one, expenditure incurred by the Election Commission and two, expenditure incurred by the political parties. If the country goes for "One Nation One Election" it will save huge money. **There are 4120 MLAs in the 31 states & UTs.** The maximum expenditure limit for bigger assemblies is 28 lacs. It means if all the states & UTs go for one time election then its total cost would be around Rs. 11 billion. Usually around 5 states go for polls every year.



Source: CMS Analysis & Estimation

A report released by Centre for Media Studies has estimated with an estimated Rs 60,000 crore spent in 2019 Lok Sabha elections is the most expensive elections. This amount is nearly double the amount spent on Lok Sabha elections in 2014

- **Speedy Development Work:** It is observed that when the election Model Code of Conduct is in force then no new project/policy, recruitment, appointment, transfer take place. If elections are not conducted annually then the government need not to woo general public through lucrative schemes and make caste and religion based programmes. Even State and Central Government need not to prepare lucrative budget every year and they can take tough decisions for the betterment of the economy. So simultaneous parliamentary & assembly polls will ensure continuity in policies and programmes of the central and state governments.
- **Time Saving –** Generally it is noticed that when dates of elections are announced then almost all leaders from the parties (centre, state and local governments) start campaigning for their party members who contest the elections. Almost half of the year is spent by the parties to focus for the next elections. Time is wasted on designing strategies and discussing the actions of the opposition parties. The name calling and blame game takes a lot of time that could rather be used for productive policy criticism.
- **Vote Bank Appeasement -**With elections around the corner, most political parties resort to gimmicks to win or destroy the reputation of other parties. They formulate policies only those which would earn an advantage for the vote bank and in turn, help in elections. For instance, road construction and infrastructure development seem to occur only when elections are around the corner. Most importantly, people are tired of this kind of appeasement. Having a feeling of losing voters, politicians prevent the passage of long-term useful policies but promote those which give immediate dividends.

- **Check on Black Money:** It is an open secret that elections are fought with black money. A huge black money is turned into white money during elections in the country. So if the elections are conducted throughout the year then there is a possibility that parallel economy will grow in the country. In order to find the solution of this problem simultaneous election would help at a large to control and check black money as it is somehow crystal clear that regular elections is a way to promote corruption.
- **Better use of the Government Machinery:** For holding elections hundreds of central police forces in addition to state police have to be deployed. A number of teachers from schools and colleges and other employees from different departments work under Election commission during the election times. Machinery to conduct free and fair elections in the country and states is also required. Not only it costs huge amount of money but the security forces also are diverted from their core mandate of ensuring internal security in the country. Similarly employees of other departments also remain busy whereas unfollowing their primary job of their concerned department for the while.
- **Helpful to Maintain Communal Harmony:** India is a land where we find huge variation among religion, caste, cultural, creed and so on. Due to repeatedly elections occurring, people seem emotionally more attached with the results of polls. To get victory in the elections candidates do not even hesitate to play the card of caste, religion and creed etc. of the people which sometimes cause communal disharmony among the electors. If elections take place after a gap of almost half decade, people would have ample time to maintain good relations among each other and to understand strategies and tactics of politicians that are solely based on to win the elections.

4. Demerits of “One Nation One Election”

- **Local issues will fade out:** It is observed that elections for state assemblies and Lok Sabha are fought on different issues. During Lok Sabha elections parties target national and international issues whereas contrary to it, in regional elections, major concerns remain related to state concerned. So there is a possibility that regional parties will not be able to raise the local issues strongly.
- **Regional Parties may strive for Existence:** In Lok Sabha elections issues remain publically concerned to national and international level and national parties are more indulged with such issues. If Simultaneous election would take place in future then local parties may strive for their existence because their survival is based on regional issues. Hence, one nation, one poll may come with heydays for national parties but decay of regional parties.
- **Consensus of regional parties:** It will be the biggest problem in simultaneous election to have consent of regional party because there is always a tendency for voters to vote the same party in state and at the Centre in case the Lok Sabha polls and the state elections are held together and without the coordination of state parties simultaneous election is not possible.
- **Requirement of Huge Machinery & Resources:** As we know that India is the largest democracy in the world so it will be daunting task to conduct simultaneous election in all the states, UTs and Lok Sabha. According to the Law Commission, if the country goes for simultaneous election then the election commission need to spend Rs 4,500 crore on new EVMs.
- **Constitutional Problems:** One time election seems almost impossible due to democratic set up of the country. Suppose if elections are conducted simultaneously but it is not sure that all the states and central government will be formed by the full majority. It is also possible that some parties make alliance government which can fall any time before 5 years. So there is a possibility of re-election in the whole country.

These are some merits and demerits of Simultaneous elections, but now, above all, we need to see practicality for the implementations of one nation, one election. Further, we will discuss the **feasibility** of one nation, one poll.

Amendments are required in the following articles:

- Article 83 which deals with the duration of House of Parliament needs an amendment
- Article 85 (on dissolution of Lok Sabha by the president)
- Article 172 (relating to the duration of state legislature)
- Article 174 (relating to dissolution of state legislature)
- Article 356 (on President's Rule)
- The Representation of People Act, 1951 would have to be amended to build in provisions for stability of tenure for both parliament and assemblies. This should include the following crucial elements:

1. Restructuring the powers and functions of the Election Commission of India to facilitate procedures required for simultaneous elections
2. A definition of simultaneous election can be added to section 2 of the 1951 Act.

At present, countries like Sweden, Indonesia, South Africa, Germany, Spain, Hungary, Belgium Poland, Slovenia and Albania etc. are conducting Simultaneous elections successfully.

Most importantly, If Britain can do it then why cannot India?

In Westminster itself, in 2011, British Parliament passed **fixed-Term Parliament Act 2011**. This act stipulates that

- Elections will be held every five years on the first Thursday in May.
- A government in office can only be removed and fresh elections called

If either by a 2/3 majority of all members, including absent members, Parliament decides to advance the date of election or

If by the same sort of 2/3 majority, Parliament passes a no-confidence motion. If this motion is not reversed within a fortnight by the sitting government, also with a 2/3 majority, then new elections have to be called

Thus every government can last full five years unless it has a 2/3 majority against it. This is tough but fair rule,

In Indian conditions, one could modify it by putting the bar at 60%. But the idea is that elected governments should not be lightly dismissed. The UK has not extended this principle to the regions as Parliaments at Westminster does not have the power. For India, any such act would require re-examination of Article 356.

About no-confidence motion, it is mentioned in Rule 198 of the Rules and Conduct of Business of the Lok Sabha. According to this, 50 or more members of the Lok Sabha can move a no-confidence motion. And if it is passed then ruling party has resign and neither party is able to form the government, premature elections are conducted. For this, solution can be taken from German Parliament, when a no-confidence motion is moved against a chancellor, a confidence motion has to be moved as well. So both motion pass, then the new Chancellor is appointed by the German President.

5. Conclusion

In a crux, the idea of simultaneous elections has advantages as well as difficulties in implementation. In the present scenario, it seems tough to adopt the system of "One Nation One Election" because the regional parties will not agree to adopt this system because they have experienced the worst defeat in the recent Lok Sabha elections. So before getting the accord of all political parties the central government need to do the required preparation for the "One Nation One Election". There are various ifs and buts before the idea of simultaneous elections may finally be implemented. Modi government has already put an appearance of doughty steps in its first tenure by implementing demonetization and GST. If the simultaneous election happens, there will be some problem for our nation but it is time to think beyond the boundaries and

traditional limit and try to understand the implications of the simultaneous elections.

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