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ELECTORAL REFORMS AND POLITICAL FUNDING

INTRODUCTION:

Politics is misunderstood as the most powerful position because money is the one that manipulates politics. While contesting an election, every candidate needs money to advertise promises and reach out to every corner of the constituency. In a healthy democracy, free and fair elections are practiced and for that, a level playing field is mandatory. More often, money, muscle, and political powers impact an election that partializes the mood of the voters. And to avoid such acts, the parliament has tried to reform the electoral process of the country, however, we know that even after so much effort, the elections in our country are not completely fair.

FACTORS AFFECTING ELECTIONS:

Assets worth millions are spent every day to fund the election campaign of a candidate and that money does not necessarily come from the candidate itself or the political party that he belongs to. Local industrialists, businessmen, and some supporters give money to the candidate so that if he turns out to be a winner, then he will provide them with some extra benefits, this is called Quid Pro Quo. On the other hand, there can be a situation where some candidate from the same constituency does not get the same support for money. Under such a state of affairs, the level playing field becomes unstable and the money power manipulates the election due to this, maybe sometimes, an undeserving candidate gets the mandate.

Money is not the only power that affects the election, as it can not scare the voters, muscle power

does. Giving tickets to the ex-criminals or to a person who is accused of murder or rape or extortion or similar crimes, can make voters sense fear of voting against such a candidate.

Former Vice-President of India, Shri Venkaiah Naidu also highlighted the issue and called for immediate actions by the political parties and judiciary¹. Data shows that about 28% of the Members of Legislative Assemblies in India have allegations of serious criminal cases².

REFORMS FOR ELECTIONS AND REALITY:

Apart from creating fear in the minds of voters, the political parties also use smoother ways to attract voters that cause no violence but affect more. Distributing liquor is one such way through which the candidate tries to impress the poor voters and get votes. The Election Commission of India has banned the sale of alcohol on the eve before and the day of elections³, however, this does not have any impact as the supporters buy a large number of bottles a few days before the election and distribute them during the election.

The cash flow during the Lok Sabha elections has limits as per the guidelines by the Election Commission of India, it has been increased to 75 lakhs and 95 lakhs, depending on the state. The reality is 180 degrees opposite to the suggested amount. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, all the

¹ M. Venkaiah Naidu, 'Democracy Interrupted: The rising number of Criminals in Politics', Indian Express (December 05, 2022) <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-democracy-criminals-in-politics-8305855/> (last accessed April 14th 2024)

² 'Nearly Half of MLAs in India have Criminal Cases: ADR Analysis', The Hindu (July 20, 2023) <https://frontline.thehindu.com/news/data-nearly-half-of-mlas-in-india-have-criminal-records-adr-analysis/article67090605.ece> (last accessed April 14th 2024)

³ Sujit Kumar Bisoyi, 'Ban liquor sale a week before rural election: Opposition', The Times of India (November 07, 2021) <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhubaneswar/ban-liquor-sale-a-week-before-rural-election-opposition/articleshow/87567188.cms> (last accessed April 14th 2024)

political parties spent Rs.60000 crore⁴.

It has been predicted that the total amount spent in the 2024 general election shall be not less than Rs 1.2 trillion⁵. Looking at the numbers, it can be easily said that there is no concern about the rules made by the Election Commission of India.

ELECTORAL BONDS:

To eradicate the use of black money in politics, the government of India brought electoral bonds in 2018, however, the act turned out to be a disastrous one as the transparency between the donors of political parties and the citizens was killed. Allegations of Quid Pro Quo were raised; distribution of the amount donated to the governing parties in the Centre and the states, and the opposition parties saw huge differences. The Petition was filed in the Supreme Court and the Apex Court struck down the act and called it Constitutionally invalid⁶.

⁴At an Estimated Rs60,000 Crore, Lok Sabha elections costliest ever; BJP spent 45% of it, Study Shows' News 18 (June 04, 2019) <https://www.news18.com/news/politics/with-about-rs-100-cr-spent-in-each-ls-constituency-we-just-witnessed-the-most-expensive-election-ever-2171789.html> (last accessed April 14th 2024)

⁵ Dipu Rai, 'Price of power: Does democracy pay for parties' race to dominate?', India Today (March 20, 2024) <https://www.indiatoday.in/diu/story/price-of-power-does-democracy-pay-for-parties-race-to-dominate-lok-sabha-election-funding-electoral-bonds-2517380-2024-03-20> (last accessed April 14th 2024)

⁶ Krishnadas Rajagopal, 'Supreme Court declares Electoral Bonds Scheme unconstitutional', The Hindu (February 15, 2024) <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/electoral-bonds-scheme-unconstitutional-sbi-should-reveal-the-details-of-donors-rules-sc/article67848211.ece> (last accessed April 14th 2024)

SUGGESTIONS:

The Election Commission of India has to increase the amount of money being spent by the candidates so that they do not have to use black money for advertising. Apart from that, the election commission should also collaborate with local administrations to look at the flow of money.

CONCLUSION:

Indian elections are interesting to cover. When it comes to portrayal, Hollywood movie directors show India by capturing the slums of Dharavi, but if by chance they get to witness the election campaigning, they will get to know how much money Indians keep at stake even if they know that they are going to lose it. The Election Commission of India needs better plans to tackle the sharp minds of Indian politicians and should hold all-party meetings and convey their message strictly. The judiciary and election commission should join hands to deal with law-breaking lawmakers.