
UNIT 6 ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL POLITICS

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6.1 INTRODUCTION

Election is a device through which a modern state creates among its citizens a sense of involvement and participation in public affairs. A good electoral system is the bedrock of genuine representative government. Much depends on how the system operates in practice, whether competent and honest administrators free from political bias conduct elections efficiently and impartially. The absence of general confidence in the verdict of the ballot may destroy the faith of public in the democratic process. Stressing the importance of electoral process, Pollock observed, “Unless public elections are conducted with accuracy and efficiency, not only the public services are discredited but the whole democratic system is endangered.”

India is a constitutional democracy with a parliamentary system of government, and at the heart of the system is a commitment to hold regular, free and fair elections. These elections determine the composition of the government, the membership of the two houses of parliament, the state and union territory legislative assemblies, and the Presidency and vice-presidency.

6.2 ROLE OF ELECTIONS IN DEMOCRACY

Nowadays, elections have emerged as an instrument of choice all over the democratic world. Elections serve as the basic mechanism for both electing and replacing ruling elites and for providing a regular and systematic succession in government. They help to determine how a country is governed and at the same time select who will exercise state power. Elections are also the principal mechanisms by which citizens hold governments accountable, both retrospectively for their policies and more generally for the manner in which they govern. Elections reinforce party activities and intensify political awareness of the people. They educate voters and grant legitimacy to government.

Although elections are considered as one of the core institutions in democratic polities, their misuse is not uncommon. Elections produce different outcomes in different systems of government. Leaders of all kinds, from military dictators to civilian autocrats, recognise the power and importance of elections in obtaining legitimacy to govern. Military or civilian leaders willing to run the country through undemocratic means, use elections as a tool for their continuation in power. These leaders make major efforts to manipulate elections.

However, in spite of all the shortcomings and inconsistencies of an electoral system, elections can decide important matters in any polity. Only elections establish that legitimate political power flows from below. Elections, then, are essential for democracy, but only when they are free and fair and devoid of irregularities and malpractices. Electoral malpractices not only negate the voting right of the people but also hamper the effort to institutionalise democracy.

Electoral corruption is a major type of political corruption. It thrives in a society in which the degree of political and administrative morality is low. The necessity of a transparent electoral system is one of the most important prerequisites for present day democratic practice in both developed and developing countries. Electoral corruption negatively influences the consolidation of democracy. Governments, claiming to be democratic, manipulate elections to cling to power. Electoral malpractices are the main source of misunderstanding between the ruling and opposition parties in many states and have often led to political crisis. In India, Jammu and Kashmir is the classic example in this regard.

6.3 ELECTION MACHINERY

Democratic practices are sustained and strengthened through elections. The authority vested with the conduct of elections should, therefore, be competent, effective, independent and impartial. The makers of the constitution of India had given the country an unified authority, Election Commission (EC), independent of the central and state governments, for organising elections to the Union and state legislatures. The powers of the EC are essentially administrative and marginally adjudicative and legislative. Its triple powers have so far been exercised without ever being objected to by the judiciary. It was initially envisaged to be a single member Commission. The EC was enlarged in October 1993 with the appointment of two ECs (Election Commissioners). The President appoints the CEC (Chief Election Commissioner) and ECs. The Tarkunde Committee in 1975 and the Goswami Committee in 1991 suggested that the President should make appointment to the EC on the advice of a Committee comprising the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, the Prime Minister, and the Chief Justice of India.

In the first three decades after independence, EC's role was peripheral because there was little malpractice and violence. Towards the end of eighties, Mandal and Mandir issues emerged on the political scene and the politics of consensus collapsed. Politicisation on caste and communal lines took the centre-stage. Electoral process was vitiated and the violence, rigging, intimidation of voters and misuse of governmental machinery became common. The situation called for prompt reforms in the electoral process. However, despite expression of serious concern by politicians of all hues, no substantial reform was effected. The EC had no option but to resort to the use of its constitutional and legal powers in the interest of free, fair and peaceful election. It has fought many battles in the apex courts of the country against forces inimical to the healthy democratic development. The EC unhesitatingly ordered repolls at polling stations and whole of constituencies if the original poll was vitiated. Elections were countermanded because of booth capturing, rigging and violence on a massive scale, in several constituencies over the years. The model code of conduct is being strictly enforced by the EC. The election law is also being implemented effectively for disciplining the candidates and parties. The effective enforcement of election law and model code of conduct by the EC had salutary effects in the conduct of elections since 1990s. The credit for improving the functioning of election machinery in the country is mainly attributed to T.N. Seshan, former CEC.

6.4 ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND PROCESS

Elections are part of a larger political process, which includes nominations, campaigning, and the actual voting. In brief, all those means whereby a person becomes a member of an elected assembly can be termed as the electoral process. W.J. Mackenzie has laid down four conditions for free and fair election, namely, an independent judiciary to interpret electoral law; an honest competent, non-partisan administration to conduct elections; a developed system of political parties, well enough organised to put their policies, and teams of candidates before the electors as alternatives between which to choose; and a general acceptance throughout the political community of certain rules of the game, which regulate the struggle for power. No developing countries can claim to meet these conditions fully. However, India comes closest to meeting them in comparison to others. It can rightly boast of an independent judiciary and a non-partisan election administration. Although India cannot claim to have a developed system of political parties, there is a general acceptance of certain rules of the game, which has gained deeper roots with time.

Elections have acquired a central place in the Indian political system. The campaigns are marked with intense political debates, symbolic processions and increasing use of electronic technology by major political parties. Visual symbols acquire greater importance in India due to widespread illiteracy. Voters identify the candidate with the help of the symbols allotted to them. Issues in form of slogans become critical at times like *garibi hatao* (remove poverty) in 1971, *loktautra bachao* (save democracy) in 1977, stable government in 1980, corruption in terms of Bofors scandal in 1989, mandal-mandir controversy in 1991. Argument over ideology or policy issues are debated during campaigns as all parties make almost similar promises to eradicate poverty and unemployment, combat corruption, preserve national unity, etc. Despite poverty and illiteracy the people have displayed maturity of judgement through their native intelligence and common sense in choosing, and also changing the government according to their choice.

6.5 ELECTION IN INDIA: AN EXERCISE ON MASSIVE SCALE

Elections are the great public ceremonies of Indian life. In India, the elections are massive spectacles mobilising millions of people into the political process. They are, thus, not only great festivals providing entertainment and excitement for virtually the entire population but have also acquired what Albinski and Pettit have termed as “a sacramental or commemorative aspect” and has become “a conspicuous symbol of nationhood and social purpose.” In the words of Morris Jones and Biplab Das Gupta, “Elections in India provide the occasion for the widest degree of popular participation; they constitute the most important single arena for genuine competition between political groups; they are the principal agency through which recruitment to a significant part of the political elite is affected.” The elections tend to be complex events in India since they involve individual and collective decisions and directly affect the total political and social process. Unlike most of the new states in the developing countries, elections in India have been central, not peripheral to the system.

6.6 VOTING PATTERN

The General Election is considered as a sacred process that not only ratifies the principle of democracy generally but it strengthens the pillars of Indian democracy as well. The voting pattern shows that the percentage of female voters who cast their votes has significantly increased from 46.63 per cent in the third General Election to 55.64 per cent in 1999 election. A look at the results of the last five General Elections reveals that there is a decline in the performance of the national parties taken together both in terms of total number of seats won as well as their vote share. Regional parties gained at the cost of national parties during this period. This is one of the factors that have contributed to federal coalition governments in the recent past. All the regional parties put together could get only 27 seats in 1989 elections. They improved their tally to 51 in 1991 and 129 in 1996. But there was a decline in seat share to 101 in 1998 and subsequently an increase 158 in 1999. There was a corresponding increase in their vote share also. In 1989 their vote share was 9.28 per cent of the total valid votes polled. But it increased 26.93 per cent in the 1999 polls. National Parties always got a higher percentage of seats compared to their vote share. Regional parties and independents were the losers who could get lesser percentage of seats compared to their vote share.

Elections are political processes, which provide a link between the society and the polity and between the traditional social systems and evolving political structures. Therefore, the elections must be analysed within the context of the total political and social system. Elections perform different roles in different political systems. They may contribute to political development in some, to political decay in others. They may sometimes be used as veiled disguises for authoritarianism. In established democracies, there are institutional procedures for system maintenance and also the instruments for support building, interest aggregation, peaceful and orderly transfer of power, recruitment and training of leaders, and above all for an increasing democratisation of the political system. Thus, the elections are devices for legitimacy, identification, integration, communication, political education, participation, socialisation, mobilisation, conflict resolution, political choice, and political control. Elections induct an element of accountability

into a political system and make it possible for the citizens to exercise a genuine and meaningful degree of political choice and control. This, in turn, makes the system itself a democratic and effective instrument of governance.

6.7 DETERMINANTS OF ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR

Election studies show that a combination of factors determines the electoral behaviour. These factors include mainly religion, language, region, caste, tribe, etc. In Punjab the religious, linguistic and regional factors have been used by the Akali Dal to garner votes. The regional and linguistic factors were used to mobilise votes in Tamil Nadu by the DMK, AIADMK, in Andhra Pradesh by the in Telugu Desam, in Assam by AGP. With increased democratisation and politicisation, the political parties have tried to exploit the caste factor for election purpose, which in turn enables elite group of castes to get inducted into the political process. In fact, caste is the most commonly used factor of mobilisation. It does, however, not mean that all the castes or even an entire caste becomes politicised or mobilised to influence the political system.

The caste associations in India began much before independence as agents of Sanskritisation seeking to secure educational, service and other facilities to raise the status of their caste in social hierarchy. But their post-independence role has become much more important and complicated since now they combine the roles of pressure groups in economic and political field as well. The caste associations have made people conscious of their rights and privileges. Their most important contribution lies in making the illiterate masses participate effectively in politics. Through this process, politicisation of caste has reached a stage where not only is the caste regarded as one of the main issues for deciding in favour of a candidate by the voters but caste is also one of the most important variables in the distribution of election tickets and formation of ministries. Thus, the caste connections of leaders, command over their caste men and the ability to form coalitions of castes for the purpose of political gains came to play significant roles. With the introduction of universal adult franchise, the dalits and other backward castes became conscious of their potential power due to their sheer numerical size.

Caste solidarity has acquired tremendous importance. People tend to vote either for a party with which their caste or sub-caste is identified, or for a respected member of their caste, irrespective of his/her party affiliation. What Paul Brass had observed in 1965 in the context of state election is now relevant in the context of national election; "The role of caste in elections is easily the most discussed aspect of contemporary Indian political behaviour." The interaction between caste and electoral politics has resulted in traditionalisation of politics, on the one hand, and politicisation of caste, on the other. According to Rajni Kothari, "The alleged casteism in politics is thus no more and no less than politicisation of caste. By drawing the caste system into its web of organisation, politics finds material for its articulation and moulds it into its own design. In making politics their sphere of activity, caste and kin groups, on the other hand, get a chance to assert their identity and to strive for positions." In the democratic process politics has penetrated into the remote villages of India. Political consciousness and participation have increased among all segments of the society awakening them to the power of their votes in determining the fate of political leaders. Thus, at times electoral process has been the route to social mobility as in the case of Yadavs in UP and Bihar. Awakened to its political weight by force of numbers, the community has dominated the political scene in the states since mid

1980s. The logic of electoral politics has also compelled the political parties to broaden their social or caste base. Thus, anti-high caste parties like the DMK and BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) had to co-opt the higher castes to make their regional identity more inclusive, while the upper castes and urban parties like the BJP have to reach out to the middle and lower castes and rural periphery to challenge the Congress dominance.

The acceptance of universal adult franchise and extension of political power to the common man by the Indian constitution, irrespective of caste, community and sex was a revolutionary step. There have been changes of government both at the Centre and in the states several times through the election process. By political participation one may refer to those legal activities by citizens which are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and policy decisions.

The robustness of democratic institutions depends on three interrelated phenomena. First, there must exist a cadre of political activists who are committed to democratic principles and compete among themselves for capturing political power within the confines of democratic rules of the game. Second, there must be available an institutional structure that facilitates articulation of divergent public policies and promotes smooth transformation of inputs into appropriate systemic outputs. And lastly, there must exist a generalised commitment to democratic values and norms on the part of the general public.

The most fundamental reality of the Indian society is the overwhelming poverty. A vast multitude of Indians is unemployed and underemployed. The rate of literacy is very low. The illiteracy among the dalits and the poor is almost total. It is this vast ocean of humanity living in the rural India, which constitutes the basic reality of India. It is this majority of population living below and just above the poverty line which has the major share of votes in the Indian elections. Poor, illiterate, superstitious with a sense of belonging only to the caste or religion, and with no access to proper communication, except occasionally the government run broadcasting system, this enormous human wave is being driven to the polling station, every now and then to cast its sovereign will.

It is mainly on this section of the population that the outcome of the election really depends. The election thus becomes an occasion when their consent is manipulated not to promote their interest but to sustain a political system that expects them to surrender their sovereign right. This is clearly reflected in the class nature of the electoral slogans as well as the performance of the parties once they come into power. The 'socialistic pattern' benefited the private sector more; and nationalisation of banks really meant more capital becoming available to the big business houses.

The dominant social groups often infringe upon the rights of the dalits, lower backwards and other disadvantaged groups. The most common method adopted is a simple one of voting by proxy; the labourers leave the choice to the landowner, who advises and persuades them not to go to the booth as their votes would be cast. In case they are undecided and look like voting for someone other than the choice of the landowner, they are prevented from voting. Such practice has been going on almost since the beginning of election in India, but more openly and on a larger scale since the sixties, with the emergence of the rural elite of landlords and kulaks as an influential lobby at the state politics.

The political parties and their leaders too all along have adopted a policy of non-interference in the rural sector so as not to annoy the land owning classes, without whose help and feudal vote banks, a candidate could not hope to win. By and large, this forms the basis of the voting pattern in the rural India. The feudal patron-client relations have not yet been replaced, though there is a trend towards their erosion in certain parts of the country. This manifests in the social life as a close nexus between class, caste and citizenship and strengthens the operation of vote banks and vote contractors in the Indian electoral politics. Role of caste and religion are very important in this context.

6.8 CASTE AS A DETERMINANT OF ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR

Caste has always played a decisive role in the electoral politics in India. While the higher caste Brahmins, Bhumihars, Rajputs have dominated the politics of several parts of India, the middle castes like Jats, Marathas, Yadavs, Reddies, Kammas, Vokkaliggas, etc., emerged powerful caste groups as a result of land reforms and Green Revolution. In the recent past even dalits, especially in North India have become an important and decisive caste group. The rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh is the most important example of increasing role of dalits. The caste groups, infact, have come to known as the “vote banks” of political parties in the light of their support to the parties.

Caste loyalties are to be exploited by the respective caste elites for their class interests. At the time of elections when it becomes more a question of number game, the caste groups seek to mobilise the support of not merely their own caste members but also those of others. Caste plays its role both in both ways – in the unorganised way and in the form of caste association caste. According to some scholars caste plays a secular role in Indian democracy. It has absorbed and synthesised some of the new democratic values, and has lost its ritual significance. In the democratic process caste affects the democracy and gets itself affected in turn.

Rudolph and Rudolph say that there are three types of mobilisation on the basis of caste: vertical, horizontal and differential. Vertical mobilisation is the marshalling of the political support by traditional notables in local societies that are organised and integrated by rank, mutual dependence and the legitimacy of traditional authority. Horizontal mobilisation involves the marshalling of political support by class or community leaders and their specialised organisations. Differential mobilisation involves the marshalling of direct or indirect political support by political parties and other integrative structures from viable but internally differentiated communities through parallel appeals to ideology, sentiment and interest.

Even the communists in India used caste idioms for mobilising the class of agricultural labourers in Andhra Pradesh, on the ground of caste-class correspondence. The functioning of the various political parties proves the vital role of the caste. In the selection of the candidates, formulation of campaign strategies and mobilisation of votes on the basis of caste show that political parties show the significance of caste in political mobilisation. The coming together of various middle and lower castes on the basis of the common interest of the peasantry class has helped the communist to further consolidate themselves.

6.9 DRAWBACKS OF ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The working of Indian electoral system has witnessed several drawbacks and malpractices. The discrepancy between the votes cast for a party and the seats won in parliament, the multiplicity of political parties, personality cult in party system, exploitation of caste and communal loyalties, role of muscle and money power, misuse of governmental machinery, fraudulent practices like booth-capturing, intimidation and impersonation of voters are important drawbacks of Indian electoral system.

Election malpractices range from the physical capturing of booths to the organisation of youth wings of parties or goon squads who could target and terrorise particular communities before the poll to prevent them from voting. Even the poll staff is either bribed into active connivance or intimidated into passive acquiescence. The menace of booth capturing has been in vogue since the second general election of 1957, especially in Bihar. The phenomenon gradually spread over the country in different forms and dimensions.

The rising need for the muscle power in elections necessitated more input of money too. Earlier voters used to be bribed individually, then it was found to be more convenient to buy musclemen who could ensure victory by capturing booth or intimidating voters rather than buying individual voters. This has led to progressive criminalisation of politics and the emergence of politician-underworld nexus. Gradually, the criminals themselves have started contesting elections instead of helping others. At times, the politicians found it necessary to politicise the bureaucracy. This can be gauged from the scale on which most of the high officials are changed with the change of a government. This is done to condition the bureaucracy to act in favour of the ruling party during elections. The official machinery is used to collect information on political rivals. The official machinery come handy in hiring crowds, intimidating targeted sections of voters, creating local tensions, conditioning staff for poll duties, enrolling additional voters or removing certain names from there, etc. They also, in turn, allow the bureaucracy to make money so that they remain vulnerable. In the process significant sections of bureaucracy get incorporated into the politician-underworld-bureaucracy nexus. In its efforts to cleanse the electoral process, the EC has put a ban on transfers and promotions after the elections are announced. Although significant, the measure is of limited value as the final dispositions of the bureaucracy are usually made much in advance. Other practices of misuse have also been banned under model code of conduct that has come to be more strictly enforced since T.N. Seshan days.

Electioneering tends to be an expensive exercise. In a vast country like India this is more so because the electoral constituency is usually very large both in terms of size and population. With mass illiteracy, a candidate is required to make extensive personal contacts with the voters, which involve enormous expenditure. One important reason for the elections to have become so expensive in our times is the growing distance of political parties from the people. Transport, publicity and maintaining the campaigners involve enormous amount. The desire to win an election at any cost and the increasing reliance on the muscle power in elections have necessitated unbelievably enormous expenditures collected through dubious means, by the political parties and their candidates.

The gap between expenses incurred in an election and legally permitted limit on expenses is also increasing with time. Ceilings on campaign expenses being low, black money in form of donations to election fund of political parties or powerful leaders have come to be an established fact. It is estimated that 90 per cent of all election funds comes from the big business houses in expectation of special favours or patronage. This not only eliminates men and women of ability and integrity from electoral contest for lack of financial support but also promotes criminalisation of politics.

6.10 ELECTORAL REFORMS

The need of electoral reforms was felt quite early in India. The various committees and commissions appointed by the parliament, government and opposition parties have made attempts in this regard. First such major effort for electoral reforms was made in 1971, when a Joint Parliamentary Committee on Amendments to Election Law was appointed under the chairmanship of Jagannath Rao, which submitted its report in 1972.

In 1974, Jayaprakash Narayan as president of the Citizens for Democracy (CFD) set up a committee under the chairmanship of Justice V.M. Tarkunde for electoral reforms. This committee popularly known as Tarkunde committee was asked to suggest measures to combat among other things the various forms of corrupt practice like the use of money and muscle power, misuse of official machinery and the disparity between the votes polled and the number of seats won, etc. Tarkunde committee submitted its report in February 1975. On the basis of this report, J.P. launched the people's movement against corruption and for electoral reforms and presented the People's Charter to the presiding officers of both Houses of Parliament on March 6, 1975. Urging the Parliament and assemblies to be more responsive to popular aspirations, the charter demanded that the unanimous recommendations of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reforms be implemented without delay.

The Janata Party after assuming power in 1977 constituted a cabinet sub-committee on electoral reforms headed by the then Union Home Minister Charan Singh. At the same time, the CEC S.L. Shaktidar made significant suggestions on various issues ranging from election expenses to booth capturing. An agreement to reduce voting age from 21 to 18 years was also reached. But the Janata Party government fell before it could initiate any electoral reform.

The National Front government under V.P. Singh in January 1990 formed another committee on electoral reforms headed by the then Law Minister Dinesh Goswami. The committee did laudable and prompt work and submitted its report in May 1990. On the basis of the proposals therein, the government introduced four bills in the Parliament to give effect to its recommendations. But this government also fell before these bills could be enacted.

The Narasimha Rao government convened a special session of the Parliament to get two bills; the Constitution Eighty- Third Amendment Bill 1994 and the Representation of the People Second Amendment Bill, 1994, passed. However, the bills were withdrawn before introduction. The United Front coalition government succeeded in getting the Representation of the People Second Amendment Act enacted in July 1996. The important provisions of the act are as follows:

- 1) Candidates will not be allowed to contest more than two seats at a time.

- 2) Non-serious candidates will be deterred from contesting parliamentary and assembly elections through a ten-fold increase in the security deposit from Rs. 500 to Rs. 5000.
- 3) Elections will not be countermanded because of the death of a candidate. In the case of a candidate of a recognised political party, the party will have the authority to nominate a replacement within seven days. No such replacement will be allowed in the case of an independent.
- 4) The campaign period is reduced from 21 days to 14 days.

The reforms though minimal to begin with can pave the way for more thorough and comprehensive overhauling of the electoral machinery and process. The following measures can be suggested for electoral reform.

6.10.1 Change in the Electoral System

An electoral system must be truly representative. However, there is a wide gap between the votes polled and seats won in present system where no single party has ever won a majority of votes in any Lok Sabha election but has been able to capture absolute and even two third majority several times. Over the years, the system has come under severe criticism. Opinions have been expressed to change it to a system of proportional representation. L.K. Advani and C.P. Bhambhri advocated proportional representation way back in 1970; the Tarkunde committee recommended a variant of the German system in 1975. Former CECs S.L. Shaktihar and L.P. Singh have argued for a combined system of voting in which 50 per cent of the seats in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies would be filled by direct voting and the remaining on the basis of proportional representation. Tarkunde committee had also suggested combining the present Indian system with a German list system.

6.10.2 Restructuring the Election Commission

One of the basic proposals of those advocating electoral reforms since long had been that of making Election Commission a multi-member body. The Tarkunde and Goswami committees advocated three members EC. Most of the CECs have opposed it on the ground that quick decisions are sometimes required in electoral matters, which may be impeded by multi-member commission. With the 1993 Constitution Amendment Act and the 1995 Supreme Court judgement, multi-member commission has become an accomplished fact. However, the manner in which the ECs are appointed and the provision of majority decision under Art. 324A raise the suspicion that the executive may appoint as many ECs as would constitute a majority and would thus control the commission's decision. A statutory requirement of consulting the Chief Justice of India and the leader of the opposition prior to the appointment of the CEC and ECs can ensure a non-partisan character of the EC. A ban on all post-retirement appointments by the government will eliminate the tendency and possibility of the CEC and ECs pleasing the government by going out of way.

6.10.3 Eradicating the evil influences of Money and Muscle Power

To check the increasing influence and vulgar show of money, law should fix reasonable ceiling on election expenses and strict compliance of such law should be enforced as was done during T.N. Sheshan's tenure as the CEC. State funding of elections, which has been recommended by all the committees on electoral reforms, should be introduced to curb the menace of money in elections. To prevent growing criminalisation and violence there is an urgent need to implement the EC's proposal of keeping out persons with proven criminal records from electoral context. Model code of conduct should be enforced strictly. Gradually, ways and means must be found to implement the voters' right to recall as well as the right to reject candidates.

The electoral process cannot be cleansed merely by legal measures. The electoral process is influenced and determined by the political culture of the political system, which cannot be reformed by legislative acts. The enlightened citizens who are prepared to uphold political norms and punish those who violates them can be an effective instrument for clean electoral politics. Bolstering the intermediary political and civic institutions, whose collapse has accelerated electoral malpractices, can also be effective in removing the ills of electoral process. However, the strong political will and people's initiative is needed to get rid the electoral of from several defects from which it is suffering.

6.11 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have discussed the role of election in ensuring people's participation in the political system and strengthening democracy. Election can also weaken democracy, if polls are not free and fair. Therefore, our constitution makers have provided for impartial election machinery, free from executive control to conduct elections for Union and State legislatures and President and Vice-President. Elections in India are an exercise on massive scale involving millions of voters, poll personnel, security men etc.

Caste, community, religion, language, region, etc., are the main determinants of electoral behaviour. However, caste plays the most dominant role in election. Different political parties nominate candidates on the basis of caste composition of the concerned constituency and voters are mobilised on the basis of caste. Even after election caste is given due consideration in ministry formation. Thus, Indian election cannot be understood without properly understanding the role of caste in election.

Elections in India have been marred by the evil influences of money and muscle power. This has led to criminalisation of electoral politics. Earlier criminals used to lend outside support but now they themselves have entered in the electoral arena and have become not only members of the house but even have become ministers. Thus we have a new phenomena in Indian politics 'tainted ministers.' To check the rot, several committees and commissions have been appointed for electoral reforms. These committees have suggested several measures; some of them have been adopted also. But still a lot has to be done to stem the rot. However, law alone cannot clean the electoral system. Vigilant public opinion is also required. People have to be sensitised about the malaise of the electoral process. Only then, free and fair poll can be conducted, which will lead to strengthening of democracy in India.

6.12 EXERCISES

- 1) Critically examine the role of election in democracy and evaluate the role of Election Commission of India in conducting free and fair poll.
- 2) What are the important determinants of electoral behaviour in India? Critically discuss the role of caste as a determinant of voting behaviour.
- 3) What are electoral reforms? Discuss the various efforts made for electoral reforms.
- 4) Explain the increasing role of money and muscle power in election. What measures can be adopted to curb its menace?
- 5) Explain the politician-underworld-bureaucracy nexus and its impact on the electoral process in India.