

## **Drastic Poll Reforms necessary for making ‘One Nation -One Election’ Dream Come True**

by

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It is indeed shame for world’s largest democracy that a significant number of votes (fifteen) were cast in recent elections to post of Vice President of India for which only Parliamentarians cast votes. There must be at least some minimum educational qualification to contest any elections. Best is to constitute an “Indian Political Service” on lines of “Indian Administrative Service (IAS)”. It is ridiculous that so well-educated officers from IAS and allied services are at times ruled by uneducated political leaders. System will automatically abolish faulty practice of family-politics where politicians often misuse politics like some family-business rather than a tool for service to the people. Experience reveals that senior bureaucrats have done remarkably well when appointed as ministers. On the contrary, there are cases when less-educated ministers were not given repeat chance as ministers due to non-performance.

Other wide-ranging poll-reforms are also urgently needed to be simultaneously implemented without needing any never-to-be-achieved political consensus. Case of George Fernandez elected to Rajya Sabha despite having lost all his memory, even calls for medical-fitness certificates before allowing contesting elections. An RTI response reveals that even oath for his being member of Rajya Sabha was read by party-colleague of George Fernandez!

Simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and state-assemblies should be three-tier with elections to municipal bodies also included in the ideal system. But elections of the President and the Vice President should also be held simultaneously by all MPs and MLAs in the manner President is elected but through EVMs equipped with VVPAT on nominations signed by at least 34-percent MPs to ensure direct elections. In case of vacancy caused at post of President, Vice President may be made President for rest of the term. But in case of vacancy caused at post of Vice President, an interim Vice President may be elected by MPs only for rest of the term. However, in case both regularly elected President and Vice President may not be on post, fresh simultaneous elections for both the posts should be held without waiting for five-years period.

Prime Minister/Chief Ministers with Speakers and Deputy Speakers of the lower Houses should be elected through secret and compulsory vote of members of the Lower Houses through Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) equipped with VVPAT on nominations signed by at least 34-percent members. Such an elected Prime Minister/Chief Minister may be removed by same process but with compulsion of naming alternate leader in the same motion. Members not opting to vote may lose voting-right in the House even though retaining membership of the House. Without adopting such a system, aspect “One-Nation One-Election” can never be a dream-cum-true because of mid-term elections caused due to hung Lok Sabha/state-assembly or fall of governments in between. Even present Prime Minister, Chief Ministers, Speakers and Deputy Speakers may be re-elected on lines suggested here-above.

Since a person cannot represent two constituencies or become member of both Parliament and state-assembly, no person should be allowed to contest from more than one constituency or for both Parliament and state-assembly. A sitting MP or MLA should resign first from his/her earlier seat before filing nomination for the other seat. Membership of a Parliamentarian must be auto-terminated on taking oath in a state as minister (or Chief Minister) and vice-versa to prevent situation like Atal Bihari Vajpayee government falling due to single controversial vote of the then Odisha Chief Minister Girdhar Gomango who did not resign from Lok Sabha even after his being sworn as Odisha Chief Minister.

Secret voting for Rajya Sabha elections should be restored but through EVMs equipped with VVPAT system with simultaneous elections for full time and part time members. Persons getting more votes should be declared elected for full terms, and those with successive less votes may be declared elected for part terms. Constitution should be amended to abolish useless provision of Legislative Councils which is practically for political assignment to favourites and relations of political leaders. Only those not having contested any election in life should be appointed nominated members of Rajya Sabha. No MP or MLA should retain any type of post in their party or even in society. Ministerial-strength should be reduced for 10-percent of strength of lower House. Post of Parliamentary Secretaries should be abolished.

Security-losing persons should be barred from contesting elections for next six years. ‘None-of-the-above’ (NOTA) option should be made practically useful. All candidates getting votes less than ‘NOTA’ may be barred from contesting any future election even though in case NOTA winning in

any constituency, next to NOTA may be declared elected but only for that term. Thereafter he may lose right to contest any election in life-time.

Absconding Parliamentarian from court-summons/warrants if present at Sansad Bhawan even for attending the session, should not be allowed to leave Sansad Bhawan till police-authorities reach for execution of warrants. Parliamentarians and legislatures with attendance less than say 75-percent in the House should not be allowed to contest any elections for next six years. Immunity to elected representatives should be withdrawn even from legislative proceedings because in the infamous JMM-bribery case even the Apex Court expressed its inability to act against guilty ones because their bribed act to vote for Narsimharao-government was considered to be immunised being under Parliamentary proceedings. Usually Chairpersons of Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha/ Parliamentary-committees are ultra-soft on impropriety of Parliamentarians. Rules of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha should be re-written in a stringent manner by encoding fixed punishments for Parliamentarians for not following rules and norms, snatching discretionary powers of Chairpersons and Parliamentary committees. *Lok Sabha mildly punished its member Rajesh Manjhi taking his lady-friend as his wife on foreign-trip at government-expense by just barring him from few sittings of Lok Sabha even though such an act was not even immunised under Parliamentary proceedings.*

Parliamentarians should be required to compulsory fill all their particulars in their bio-data including details of their assets, name of spouse/s etc to be put on public domain of websites of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. This can check several malpractices like hiding name of additional (more than one spouse) like was done by Dharmendra when he did not disclose name of Hema Malini also as his wife.

Rule should be to make all deductions of government-dues like of water, electricity, telephone, rent or any other from salary/perks/pensions etc payable to them. Pensions should be hold till former Parliamentarians/Ministers do not vacate government-accommodations. Defaulters should be barred from contesting any next elections till all dues are cleared against them, and non-entitled government-accommodations are vacated. Since even persons posted as Prime Minister had been defaulters of dues for use of Indian Air Force (IAF) aircrafts for non-official purposes, either the Prime Minister or political party sponsoring that Prime Minister may deposit advance-money for use of IAF aircrafts for non-official use.

Since political parties are not complying with CIC-verdict bringing these under purview of RTI Act, all direct/indirect government-funding including tax-exemptions, subsidized land or leased government-accommodations, free voters' list and free Doordarshan/ Radio timings etc should be abolished. Political parties not having contested any election in last five years should be de-recognised. Sections 13A, 80GGB and 80GGC of Income Tax Act on contributions received-by and made-to political parties should be totally abolished to prevent whitening of black money by political parties getting themselves registered but not contesting elections. Live TV-debates between prominent leaders and Prime-Ministerial/Chief-Ministerial candidates should replace mega-budgeted rallies and road-shows which should be rather banned. Corruption-generating MPLADS should be abolished. Pensions to MPs and MLAs have no logic when it has been done away with government-servants. Persons with more than two children should not be allowed to contest elections. To avoid life-long ambitions of politicians to remain in power, there may be an upper age-limit of say 65 years to contest direct elections. Experienced persons if needed in the ministry can be elected as Rajya Sabha members. Retired judges of Supreme Court and High Courts must not be given post-retirement assignments or allowed to be in politics for two years after their retirement from judiciary, or else they may lose all their post-retirement benefits or appointment as arbitrators.

To avoid usual delay in approving poll-reforms by the Parliament, Election Commission should be empowered to implement poll-reforms by giving one-year notice to the Parliament. If Parliament does not disapprove reforms proposed by Election Commission within stipulated one year, these should be taken as approved by the Parliament.

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