

The Concept of One Nation One Election: An Analysis from Indian Perspective

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Abstract

In India almost every year one or the other state is geared for an election. While the election process appears to be easy and simplified process for an ordinary voter, the complexity lies not in its administration or logistics but within the massive electoral politics and vote bank politics behind it. More recently, the Hon'ble President of India and the Hon'ble Prime Minister raised the issue of holding simultaneous elections. In other words, they supported the concept of 'one nation one election' but at the end it remained unfollowed. The idea of holding state elections with general election is not new in India as it was in practice till 1967 but due to early dissolution of fourth Lok Sabha, elections got separated. This paper provides a detailed analysis of the pros and cons of the concept of 'one nation one election'. At last in conclusion it is said that in today's political arena, everything that is done is used to be considered as intent to gain vote or show the other party down. Now the big question is that is democratic India really ready to leave the traditional election mechanism and make way for One India One Election.

Key Words: One Nation One Election, Simultaneous Election, Voter, Lok Sabha, Assemblies.

Introduction

“The Ballot is stronger than the Bullet”- Abraham Lincoln

Elections are the most fundamental requirement to operationalize the democracy. They are the means to serve the people. In India, every year one or more states geared up for an election. These frequent elections may have drawbacks as the process of campaigning is often very tiring and the cost included is also very high. To get rid of this, a concept named simultaneous elections or one nation one election is gaining momentum in today's political arena.

Simultaneous election means a single voter will vote for both Lok Sabha elections as well as State Assembly elections on the same day, and elections can be conducted in phase wise manner in all the states. However, the basic problem lies in the fact that as per the constitution of India, State and union elections are to be held after a term of 5 years, but the constitution is silent as to whether this is to be done simultaneously or not.ⁱ

We can say that ‘One Nation, One Election’ is the method of holding single elections for both Lok Sabha and States instead of separate and continuous elections. Main reasons for supporting this concept are as follows:

- massive expenditure in elections;
- diversion of security and civil staff from their primary duties;
- impact on governance due to the model code of conduct during elections;
- disturbance to normal public life.ⁱⁱ

More recently, the Hon’ble President of India and the Hon’ble Prime Minister raised the issue of holding simultaneous elections. In other words, they supported the concept of ‘one nation one election. With this, there has been renewed interest and discussion over the issue. The ruling party has added a sense of nationalism to it as well by giving a nice phrase – One Nation, One Election.ⁱⁱⁱ

“As of now, the BJP holds a simple majority in the Lok Sabha, but not a special majority of two-thirds of the house, which along with the support of half the state legislatures is the support it requires to make amendments to the Constitution to institute simultaneous polling.”^{iv}

The idea of holding state elections with general election is not new in India as it was in practice till 1967 but due to early dissolution of fourth Lok Sabha, elections got separated. The 16th Lok Sabha was constituted on 18.5.2014. In the ordinary course, its term comes to an end on 17th May 2019 and the new 17th Lok Sabha should be constituted before that. The dates upto which the present assemblies in various states has been constituted is mentioned below in the table:

Table: Terms of Existing State Assemblies			
Sl. No.	State Assembly / Lok Sabha	From	To
1	Andhra Pradesh	19-Jun-14	18-Jun-19
2	Arunachal Pradesh	2-Jun-14	1-Jun-19
3	Assam	May/Jun 2016	May/Jun 2021
4	Bihar	30-Nov-15	29-Nov-20
5	Chhattisgarh	6-Jan-14	5-Jan-19
6	Goa	19-Mar-12	18-Mar-17
7	Gujarat	23-Jan-13	22-Jan-18
8	Haryana	3-Nov-14	2-Nov-19
9	Himachal Pradesh	8-Jan-13	7-Jan-18
10	Jammu & Kashmir	17-Mar-15	16-Mar-21
11	Jharkhand	6-Jan-15	5-Jan-20
12	Karnataka	29-May-13	28-May-18
13	Kerala	May/Jun 2016	May/Jun 2021
14	Madhya Pradesh	8-Jan-14	7-Jan-19
15	Maharashtra	10-Nov-14	9-Nov-19
16	Manipur	19-Mar-12	18-Mar-17
17	Meghalaya	7-Mar-13	6-Mar-18
18	Mizoram	16-Dec-13	15-Dec-18
19	Nagaland	14-Mar-13	13-Mar-18
20	Odisha	12-Jun-14	11-Jun-19
21	Punjab	19-Mar-12	18-Mar-17
22	Rajasthan	21-Jan-14	20-Jan-19
23	Sikkim	28-May-14	27-May-19
24	Tamil Nadu	May/Jun 2016	May/Jun 2021
25	Telangana	9-Jun-14	8-Jun-19
26	Tripura	15-Mar-13	14-Mar-18
27	Uttarakhand	27-Mar-12	26-Mar-17
28	Uttar Pradesh	28-May-12	27-May-17
29	West Bengal	May/Jun 2016	May/Jun 2021
30	NCT of Delhi	24-Feb-15	23-Feb-20
31	Puducherry	May/Jun 2016	May/Jun 2021

Source: Website of Election Commission, http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/terms_of_houses.aspx

The data in the table mentioned above indicated that the country may possibly witness elections to anywhere between 2 to 5 State Assemblies every 6 months till 2021.

The yearwise schedule of assemblies going to polls is as below:

Year	Assemblies
2018	Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura
2019	Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Seemandhra, Telangana
2020	Bihar, Jharkhand, New Delhi
2021	Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Puducherry
2022	Goa, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Manipur

Source: Dr. V Shankar, One India One Election^v

According to the E M Sudarsana Natchiappan, Congress MP and chairman of the Parliamentary standing committee “Now India is a much more stable and mature democracy. The time is ripe for holding simultaneous national and state elections in India.”

Pros of One Nation One Election

- Helpful in completing tenure: It will help ensure Lok Sabha complete its normal term of five years, as contemplated in the Constitution.
- Enhances accountability: The normal election routine also keeps the politicians on their toes and enhances accountability. Modi told Zee News: “Our government is such that it is run by politicians, and elections are also fought by politicians, so their energy is divided, which hurts the nation. Take me for example; I do have to pay attention to elections. If they weren’t there, I would be able to concentrate more.”^{vi}
- Saving time: The name calling and blame game take a lot of time of our politicians that could be used for something productive. On the part of common people too, it would be time saving to cast both the votes together at once.
- Saving cost: It will help in reduction the cost of election as now, Parties would not individually spend a lot on election campaigning. “Modi, for instance, cited the

expenditure on elections, saying that Rs 1,100 crore was spent on the 2009 election and Rs 4,000 crore was spent on the 2014 ones. These figures were also cited by Amita Singh, professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, who added that constant elections were deepening the divide in the country.”^{vii}

- More focus on development: Half of the year is spent by politicians concentrating on strategies for the upcoming election. It will help the senior leaders at the Centre from not getting involved with campaigning often at the cost of their ministerial work suffering.^{viii} “Political parties make up the government and if in five years there are other elections, they have to campaign for that too,” said Manohar Lal Khattar, chief minister of Haryana.^{ix}
- Model code of conduct: With one election, the time for the model code will get reduced and there will be enough time for the legislatures to discuss on policy related matter.
- Hassle free method: As all the government staff can be used at a single time. This can also help in increasing vigilance, and reducing factors like black money, booth capturing, etc.
- Reduce the Disruption of the service sector: Over a crore government employees, including a large number of teachers, are involved in the electoral process. It will help in stopping this menace.
- Security Concerns: Security forces also have to be diverted for the electoral work. One nation one election can help in solving this problem.^x Modi also mentioned that. “In this country, there’s so much security work, police work, but they’re stuck in election work”^{xi}
- Need of the time: As it can be understood from the statement that “I don’t see this as a BJP programme,” said KC Tyagi of the Janata Dal (United), which rules Bihar with the support of the BJP. “This is a national election reform.”^{xii}
- Encouraging policymaking: One election procedure would give adequate time to concentrate on policymaking without having to worry about the votes being gained or lost.
- Lowering vices: Casteism, communalism, corruption and partiality occurs because of so many elections that happen almost every year. The idea of one nation one election can be helpful in solving this problem.^{xiii}

- Good for outside residents: It will be good for those who reside outside the country as if they come to vote on election then there will be an opportunity for them to vote for all elections at one time.

Cons of One Nation One Election

- Amendments to the constitution: To conduct simultaneous elections at both levels, many amendments to the constitution of India need to be done.
- Less interaction between public-politician: Lowering down on elections would mean making them inactive or less active for the rest of the term.
- Different terms: To hold simultaneous elections, the Centre will have to make some states agree to lower down the terms of their houses while others to extend theirs.
- Not a easy process: There may also be shortage of administrative staff and security to look after the procedure.
- Mixing up the national issues: Conducting both the elections together will also mean mixing up the national issues with those of the state.
- Mutual consensus: The main problem to simultaneous polls is to get all parties political consensus.
- Voter behavior: “There is clear empirical evidence that most Indian voters tend to choose the same party when elections are held simultaneously to both Centre and State, with the relationship diminishing as elections are held farther away.”^{xiv}
- Political autonomy: It will affect the political autonomy of the state.^{xv}
- Similar parties government in state and centre: There are chances of getting similar government at both level as it happened in the election of the year 1952, 1957 and 1962.
- Consensus of regional parties: Because there is always a tendency for voters to vote the same party in state and at the Centre in case the elections are held together at both level^{xvi}

Conclusion

One India, One election is an exemplary concept but whether it will decrease the problems or not needs to be debated thoroughly. But finally we have witnessed with the announcement of

General election 2019 that it remained unfollowed. It can be a remarkable change to the Indian election system if it could be carried out with the proper execution of rules and regulations, taking care of the rising need for good administrative staff and security as “The standing committee has said that solutions should be found to reduce the frequency of elections India so that government machinery, as well as election commission, can get some time for other administrative works.”^{xvii}

Although, it may not be immediately possible to move towards this setup, it is still worth debating and finding ways to eventually do so. At last in conclusion it can be said that in today’s political arena, everything that is done is used to be considered as intent to gain vote or show the other party down. Now the big question is that Is democratic India really ready to leave the traditional election mechanism and make way for One India One Election?

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