

INFLUENCE OF ELECTIONS ON THE ECONOMY OF THE NATION

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Abstract

Electoral Politics plays a vital role in determining the economy of the country and tries to influence the functioning of the governments in the nation. When elections are declared, the policy matters that are decided and implemented try to boost the economic growth to a certain extent and rejuvenate the people's confidence in the system. The recent steps taken by the central government and state governments, be it the Food Security Bill or the incentives announced to the Central Government Employees, The Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Research, or the distribution of rice to the people living under the below poverty line (BPL) by the Government of Karnataka for One rupee, or the 'Ammma Canteen' by the Jayalalitha Government in T.N., distribution of Laptops by the Government in UP & TN, the measures taken by the RBI, at the international level, the warning given by the PM to our neighboring country Pakistan to take measures against terrorism, are some of the pre- and post electoral agenda's/schemes which are introduced to bring the political parties to power. These schemes directly or indirectly influence the economy and try to bring about a temporary confidence of the people in the functioning of the government and the system. At a time when the nation was facing severe economic crises and the downfall of rupee seen which was hitherto unheard of, some of the above mentioned schemes have brought down recession, at least to a small extent and the rupee has seen some stability thus establishing the relation between the election politics and the economy. This paper tries to analyze this relation.

Keywords: Electoral Politics, Economy, Food Security, Government, rejuvenate, temporary

Introduction

After India attained independence from the British rule major changes were incorporated socially, politically and economically and India adopted for the capitalist mode of economy. In other words we call it as 'Democracy'. The fundamental aspect of democracy is elections. As Robert Dahl has suggested "democratic development involves political participation of citizens and popular elections of officials and representatives are inevitable for its functioning."¹ Competitive elections and free democracy are essential for the modern democratic system to function and progress. The political parties need to adopt certain measures to sustain the challenges and come to power. They need to concentrate on protecting the interests and live up to the expectations of the people and focus on developmental issues to take the country forward. The concept of 'development' and the 'five year plans' that were accepted emerged in this process. When India adopted the Democratic form of system, capitalism world over was in the verge of collapse and it was in its infancy here and hence in the beginning much emphasis was given towards economic development of the country. Then what is development? And how these plans help the development?

Development is a very intricate concept wherein different countries adopt different strategies and policies for its overall enhancement. Economic development generally refers to the sustained, concerted actions of policy makers and communities that promote the standard of living and economic health of a specific area. Economic development can also be referred to as the quantitative and qualitative changes in the economy. Some questions raised are, is the goal of 'economic development' merely to increase national wealth, or is it something more subtle? Improving the well-being of the majority of the population? Ensuring people's freedom? Increasing their economic security? Etc.,

Recent United Nations documents emphasize "human development," measured by life expectancy, adult literacy, access to all three levels of education, as well as people's average income, which is a necessary condition of their freedom of choice. In a broader sense the notion of human development incorporates all aspects of individuals' well-being, from their health status to their economic and political freedom. According to the *Human Development Report 1996*, published by the United Nations Development Program, "human development is the end—economic growth a means."²

It is true that **economic growth**, by increasing a nation's total wealth, also enhances its potential for reducing poverty and solving other social problems. But history offers a number of examples where economic growth was not followed by similar progress in human development. Instead growth was achieved at the cost of greater inequality, higher unemployment,

weakened democracy, loss of cultural identity, or over consumption of **natural resources** needed by future generations.

Indian Economic system

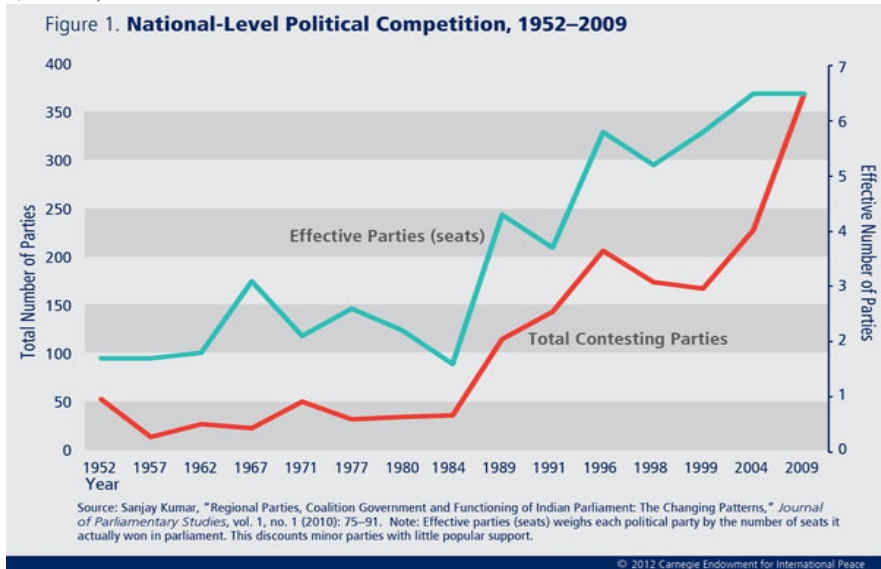
The conditions that prevailed in the post-independence resulted in the accumulation of wealth in the hands of few people and the vast majority of them were deprived of basic education, right to employment opportunities, caste and religious discrimination prevailed, and hence the common man's faith in the political system gradually started deteriorating. Mass movements started developing in various parts of the country against the policies of the congress party which led in the culmination of the declaration of emergency in 1974. At the same time to sustain, the congress party tried to bring about certain policies by adopting '*Nationalization of Industries*'. Later in 1990's India opened up the gates of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization or NEP policy that it accepted brought about tremendous changes in the economic system as well as party functioning. It is in this economic background that the functioning of the party system need to be analyzed.

Role of Political Parties and Election system

Political Parties are indispensable to the functioning the democratic system and play the most crucial role in the electoral process – in setting up candidates and conducting election campaigns. In recent years, we have witnessed a succession of unstable governments, and the reason for such a recurring phenomenon is said to be the archaic and chaotic functioning of political parties. Alliances and coalitions are made, broken and changed at whim, and the balance of power seems to be held not by those at the Union level, but by minor parties on the fringes. There is no doubt that Indian political parties have fragmented over the years. Frequent party splits, mergers and counter splits have dramatically increased the number of parties that now contest elections. In 1952, 52 parties contested elections, whilst in recent years this number has swollen to more than 437, and has been consistently increasing. Can the instability at the Union level or in the States be attributed solely to the growing number of parties, or the malaise with which the political system suffers today lies in the functioning and the dynamics of the party system in India, apart of course, from the other causes in the working of the political system as a whole?

Political parties and the party system in India have been greatly influenced by cultural diversity, social, ethnic, caste, community and religious pluralism, traditions of the nationalist movement, contrasting style of party leadership, and clashing ideological perspectives. The two major categories of political parties in India are National and State, and are so

recognized by the Election Commission of India on the basis of certain specified criteria. As of today there are six national parties (seven after the split in the Janata Dal in August 1999) and 47 regional parties recognized as such by the Election Commission of India.³(Source: Election commission of India, 2013)



(Source: Article, Milan Vaishnav, November, 2 2012, Five truths about India)⁴

When we see the history of development of these political parties it is amply clear that the major political parties as well as the regional parties though have grown by numbers, have lost the confidence of the people and hence a number of alliances /strategies are adopted to improve its own position drifting away from the ideologies that they had. Today no party is sticking to its ideology but somehow compromising to gain power. Such a trend has become a national phenomenon and Karnataka is also no exception to it. Also since these alliances have no ideological frame work they may be a short term arrangement and may function out of compulsions to retain power, thus negating the very purpose of democratic functioning.

Elections and populist Political Agendas:

The populist programs adopted by major political parties have time and again proved the relation between elections and their agendas. Some of the programs that were adopted during Mrs.Gandhi's regime were:

- The 10 point program of 1967
- The 20 point program of 1975
- Followed by 4 point program of Sanjay Gandhi
- The new 20 point program of 1982

- And above all the ‘election slogan’ that was adopted during 1971 was ‘garibi hatao’. This became one of the most populist slogans and confused not only the intelligencia but also the middle class. The ‘garibi hatao’ slogan was an attempt to popularize herself as the true protector of the people and champion of the masses. (source: India: The years of Indira Gandhi, edited by Yogendra Kumar Malik and Hitendra Kumar Vajpeyi, Library of Congress Cataloging press, p-72-73)⁵
- The oppressive measures taken by Mrs.Gandhi during emergency were accompanied by her to announce this 20 point program. Through this program she claimed to abolish the bonded labour system, introduction of land reforms system, and minimum wages to agricultural labourers and asserted that these were pro-people programs to ensure their safety and progress.⁶ (Source: Sankalp India Foundation” article 20 point programme.)

Of course these programs had a greater impact on the economy and gradually the pragmatic and liberal policies were adopted in later years. After this legacy, the congress continued its debacle and has been changing strategies to woo the people during elections. The NEP adopted in 1990’s to liberalize the economy paved way for its strengthening its position in various states. Later on when the BJP came to power it had continued to follow the principles of LPG and the recent most is the Jan Lok Bill, 2013. The party’s failure to gain power in the recently concluded state legislative assembly elections has made them to adopt such measures. In Karnataka, just before the elections the both the Congress and BJP tried its maximum to influence the voters by announcing a bunch of agendas. When the Congress came to power in Karnataka, its first measure was to introduce rice at Rupee One per kg. Though this was severely criticized by its own members, the Chief Minister defended his policy and this became so popular that we see similar popular schemes are already in vogue in neighboring states like T.N. (where the Amma Canteen, as it is called provides lunch for the poor at one rupee,) in Maharashtra lunch is provided at again rupee one. In UP a different agenda to lure the young voters were introduced. Laptop at a very low cost was one such. The AAP before elections had ensured to give corrupt free governance if it comes to power. Also its agenda included to reduce the electricity charges, provide safe environment for women, etc. Though it was able to influence the young voters and come get a reasonably good number of seats, for a party contesting election for the first time, it has not been able to form the government for various reasons.

Either dejected by the election results in the five states or to instill confidence in the people once again, the ruling UPA has just agreed to pass the JAN LOK PAL BILL. If this bill is passed (will definitely be passed) can

it counter corruption? A party full of corrupt people is introducing the JAN LOK PAL BILL. What an Irony?

The BJP on the other had come to power by inciting people on Ram Mandir issue, abolition of article 370, based on the Hintudva by raising the slogan 'India Shining'. However, the major economic policies that it adopted were from the previous Congress rule. No new policies to lessen the burden the poor and downtrodden were implemented during this period. The average growth rate of manufacturing was 9.4% in 1995-98, and only 5.2% the other major factor has been to pursue the policies in a way in which the urban affluent benefit at the cost of urban poor and the rural masses in general.

In Gujarat (a state that is considered and projected as a developed state) since the time Mr.Modi has been ruling, development is one of the top most agenda taken up during elections. What Mr.Modi and his followers are projecting 'development' as an instrument of political agenda is far from real there. The following statistics reveal the true picture.

- Gujarat's debt tripled in 10 yrs under Mr.Modi from Rs.45,301 crore in 2001-02, to 1.29 lakh crore in 2011-12.
- Male-female ratio in Gujarat far below other Indian states (886 per 1000 males) (source: 'Children in India 2012-A Statistical Appraisal,' Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation)
- Crimes on women on increase
- Infant mortality rate at 44 child deaths per 1000 live births (Source 'Children in India 2012-A Statistical Appraisal,' Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation)
- States where more than 40% and upto 50% of children are underweight are: Gujarat, Meghalaya, Chhattisgarh, U.P & Orissa.
- School life expectancy at 8.79 (source: UNDP)⁷

Now, if these popular pre/post political agenda's are to be considered as the main theme of development, then how do you define development? What is the criterion that determines if people are living happily? How is it to be believed that poverty is eliminated?

How do we judge development? Is it the per capita income, or the GDP or the standard of living of the people? or the unemployment rate? If a country's development is to be judged it has to be judged by its human development index (HDI). UN has recently adopted a new tool to measure multidimensional poverty index (MPI). It has 10 parameters which includes access to good cooking fuel, schooling, electricity, nutrition and sanitation. The Human Development Report 2013 released by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), ranked the country at a low 136 among 186 countries on its human development index (HDI) — a composite

measure of life expectancy, access to education and income levels. The HDI is considered a better measure of a country's progress than mere income growth.⁸ (Source: UNDP 2013). India with a medium Human Development Index is on a decreasing trend.

The country fails miserably on the front of gender equality. On the gender equality index, with a value of 0.610, India has one of the worst indicators in the medium human development category. For example, the country has only 10.9 per cent of seats in Parliament occupied by women. Countries like South Africa (41.1 per cent, HDI – 121), Timor-Leste (38.5 per cent, 134), Iraq (25.2 per cent, 131) and China (21.3 per cent, 101) are much ahead of India when it comes to the representation of women in decision making.⁹ (Source: India still scores low in Human Development, Jyotsna Singh, Dt. Apr 16, 2013 on 'Down to Earth' Web Page)

It is also to be noted that after the implementation of Globalization vast disparities in income is seen and while on one hand around 80% of the people live on Rs.20/- per day on the other the top billionaires of the world are from India.¹⁰ In spite of the big assurances given by these major political parties we see that the basic problems of the people remain unresolved and even today the common man is still suffering to meet the ends meet. The recent inflation in the country has made life miserable for not only the poor but the middle class also. Therefore the electoral agenda of the political parties have to be studied and understood in such a manner that they reflect the true picture of the people. For example even though the AAP got a near majority in the recently concluded Delhi Elections it is unable to form the Government because it also has come to know that 'electoral slogans' are quite different from 'real implementation'.

When the UPA II had come to power, just before the elections it had constituted the Sachar Committee to investigate into the social-economic conditions of the minority sections and based on the Sachar Committee Report, it had initiated some measures to improve their conditions. Of course, this was to win over the minority community. For the forth coming elections in 2014 the political parties are careful in deciding about the issues and the congress has taken for granted that it can come to power for the third time. The BJP on the other hand is banking upon Mr.Modi, the third front with no united voice is struggling to come to consensus. The regional parties are trying to influence the major parties. The congress is trying its best to show that cares for the people and has concern for the people's voice and hence has accepted to pass the JAN LOK PAL BILL in this session. Not only this, its stand to give external support to the AAP to form the government in Delhi also indicates how desperate it is to gain the confidence of the people. On the other, the BJP has taken the issue of patriotism and has erected the statue of Sri.Sadar Patel, the iron man of India and is playing on

the sentiments of the people. In such circumstances the voter is confused and to a certain extent has no option but to vote for any one or two.

Development Models in socialist countries

When we look into the development models of other socialist countries it is amply clear that the state controls the major production activities and hence they are able to provide the basic necessities to common man. The entire wealth is distributed for social welfare measures. In the erstwhile Soviet Union, for example the unemployment was to a very great extent eradicated. People were able to get two squares of meal without any hindrance. The country was able to produce astronauts, sports persons, doctors, engineers, scientists and above all human beings with concern for fellow citizens.

Alternate measures

Alternately what can be done? Do people's voices be ever represented in the floor of the parliament? Can we see real development? Are some of the questions that come before us. However like the Anti-corruption movement or like the Nirbhaya Movement a strong pro-people movement is required which will ultimately raise the political consciousness of the people and they would be able to truly exercise their franchise democratically which will help the democratic functioning of the political parties. In this direction, the NOTA (No to any candidate) is a positive step. Using this weapon the criminals or the anti-social elements can be kept away from winning the elections. Only a strong united people's movement can be an alternative to such problems.

Conclusion

In spite of these political agendas and measures initiated during the period of elections when the political actors come to power they not only do not adhere to the assurances given by them but also are least bothered about the people's conditions. If only they had implemented some of the agendas the vast majority of the people would not have lived in abject poverty and the country would have progressed. Democracy in the true sense would have been implemented for the people, by the people and of the people.

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