

Winner Of CSC November 2018 Essay Competition

India became a Republic on 26th January, 1950 and thus with this path-breaking achievement it ushered into an era of democracy where the general populace formed the electorate and with this began the process of quinquennial elections in India for the race to the Parliament and the state legislatures. Elections in India are a strenuous exercise that require great deal of efforts by the Election Commission so that they can be conducted effectively and impartially so that the general mandate of the public is respected thereby instilling confidence both in the voters and the elected representatives of the people. The exercise of elections not only puts the Election Commissioners and the entire machinery associated with it to extensive work -- to conduct elections in a democratic and constitutional way -- but also the candidates who contest elections go frenzy over it. Thus, elections are based upon a series of dynamics and these dynamics determine the success ratio of the candidates and the popularity they gain among the masses by promising the populace good facilities and **'development'**. Some woo the public on the token of caste and religion while the others apply the principle of **'demagogism'** -- **the practice of gaining power and popularity by arousing the popular sentiments and passions of the people.** **The first Lok Sabha (1952-57)** was in itself a **congregation of people from different faiths and religions** with different ideologies coming under the shield of the **venerated parliament** with **Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru** having the steering wheel of the government for **17 long years.** **The Indian National Congress(INC)** won **364 of the 489 seats during the First General Elections of 1951-52** and this humongous victory represented the mandate of the general population. The medley of intellectuals like **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Pandit Nehru, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Baldev Singh** gave the luminescence that was needed in the First Lok Sabha.

Elections in India are not merely quinquennial exercises (or early depending upon the duration of the assembly that may get dissolved resulting in fresh elections) but the voice of the common masses that reverberate with hopes and vigour with each election. While the public can bestow upon the love to the candidates standing for elections to a great extent in the present, it also has the power to show them their right place by dumping them in the next general elections if they fail to perform their duties effectively. Thus, the mandate of the public has immense importance. **Nikita Khrushchev once said, "Politicians are the same all over. They promise to build bridges even when there are no rivers"** and this holds true everywhere. The laxity in governance definitely impedes an economy that could have grown enormously had it been managed effectively. The representatives of the people must be raising their voices against corruption but the irony is that they themselves are corrupt. While red-tapism and growing menace of corruption is a grave issue, all major political parties seem to have the same picture when one counts the tainted ministers or members it has. **The political parties in India are classified into national and state (regional) with 7 of them-- BJP, INC, CPI, CPI(M), NCP, TMC and BSP-- being national parties** with only BJP and INC having an all-India presence. The mushrooming of regional parties and they contesting for the Lok Sabha clearly state the urge of these leaders to reach the parliament so as to bring the problems of their regions to the national forum though the real objectives of these leaders seem to be different -- **power aggrandizement.** Thus, the **elections are the basis of any democracy that has a well defined constitution to promulgate the essential features of the constitution** by electing the people's representatives to the Lok Sabha and the state legislatures.

Elections in India are a melting pot-- a place where diversity comes up and amalgamates into one unit-- of various dynamics and this dynamism helps to reach the masses and truly represent them. **'Melting pot'** is the apt term for the exercise of the Indian elections and they bring in together the various societies, cultures, traditions and theories or ideologies together on a common platform as determined by the **'secular fabric' of the Indian Constitution.** The roots of Indian secularism go back to the days of the Indian National Congress(INC) when INC fought for the Indian independence and had people from different sections of the societies. While the early 30 years of INC had only the upper class representing the masses, it was only after the efforts of Mahatma Gandhi in 1920 that the INC became a grassroot level organization with village, district and national committees of the INC being set up. The INC became the bedrock of the principles of multi-ethnicity and it is evident with the annual sessions of the INC being held across India and the chair of the

President being rotated in each session. If one looks at the **first 4 Presidents of the INC** one finds **W.C. Banerjee (1885 session of the INC), Dadabhai Naoroji (1886 session), Badruddin Tyabji (1887 session) and George Yule (1888 session)** heading these sessions individually and it itself shows that Congress was the melting pot of various cultures. The growing debate is whether the Indian elections should be treated as a **'melting pot or the salad bowl'** and the minute but prominent difference that exists between the two is something to ponder upon. **While the melting pot signifies the combination of different cultures and assimilation with intrinsic dissimilarities of each culture disappearing, the salad bowl theory follows the other way emphasizing upon the different cultures coming together but each culture maintaining its peculiarity and the Indian elections follows both if one sees the reality.** While the elections bring together the leaders on a common forum but many of the leaders still tend to retain their individuality and the regional approach they possess. So, despite the elections stimulate the assimilation of masses, even then the individuality and peculiarity exists at some point.

The Indian Elections are a regulated exercise that are based upon the statutes and laws and Election Commission in itself is a constitutional body. The laws like **'Representation of the People Act, 1950'** and **'Representation of the People Act, 1951'** determine the procedures related to elections like preparation of the electoral rolls and the code of conduct of the people contesting the elections. **India is the seventh largest country in the world and the Indian Elections are the world's largest democratically conducted exercise** and thus the fair holding of elections is also needed to bind together the constitutional ethos of democracy. As **Robert Kennedy said, "Elections remind us not only of the rights but the responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy"** and this holds true that with every fundamental right, a fundamental duty is attached and the citizens should dutifully embrace this duty to be an effective part of the democracy and hold the representatives accountable for their actions during their tenure. The beauty of elections is immense and it truly is the melting pot of various dynamics. The **42nd Amendment of 1976 to the Indian constitution** added the words **'SECULAR', 'SOCIALIST' AND 'INTEGRITY'** to the **preamble** and this amendment is also termed as the **mini constitution**. This amendment clearly threw light upon the principle of secularism and thus became a melting pot for all the communities and thus any sloganeering and electioneering on communal lines is strictly prohibited in India. **The section 123(3) of the Representation of People Act 1951 strictly emphasizes on complete ban on any reference or appeal to religion, race, community or caste during elections** and thus wooing public by dividing society on communal lines is strictly prohibited by law. Thus, the judiciary acts as the saviour when it comes to preserving the ethos of the constitution. The role of the Indian elections is to bind the people in a secular fabric and this instills the role of the poorest man in this democratic exercise. While on a satirical note, electoral malpractices also seem to unite the corrupt politicians creating thereby a melting pot in the sense one doesn't want it to be, on the other hand there exists lots of lacunae in our electoral politics that needs to be filled in with constructive ideas and cemented with the ethos of democratic values.

The glue of secularism and constitutional values keeps the sediments of politics cemented into a hard rock and this unison proves to be the melting pot of the democracy. A country like India that has innumerable cultures definitely is blessed to have a common platform like the Parliament where all the states and UTs are represented and held cohesively. Though one may see that Indian elections is a melting pot but on introspection one finds that factors like regionalism and caste pop up like germs and tried to vivisection the cohesiveness of the democratic exercise of elections and this tends to encourage the concept of communalism and sectarianism. The salad bowl theory tends to come up where inspite of coming together without any discrimination on the basis of caste, colour, creed, religion or sex, the different communities tend to maintain their ethos and individuality. While the constitution permits to conserve the indigenous heritage of each community and the ideals with **the cultural and educational rights being bestowed upon them by Articles 29 and 30** but the endowing of these rights are misinterpreted by the political agents and leaders as motives to woo voters on the caste or religious basis that is purely venomous for the secular social fabric. India has seen many splits in the political parties and this led to the passing of the **Anti- defection Law** that came as a result of **the 52nd Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1985** by the then government of Rajiv Gandhi. The various dynamics of Indian polity are being applied as per the needs and greed of the political leaders and thus the political pollution is something that is quite penetrating. History says it all and the

Dravidian movement is one of the best examples of how the Indian politics changed in modern India with the **DMK and AIADMK faction emerging after the feud and the Dravidar Kazhaghham split up** and how the power in Tamil Nadu revolved around these two contesting as the main opponents in the elections. The principle of **Coalition governments** too throws emphasis upon the dynamics of elections and the satisfaction that each partner of the coalition must derive. **The defeat of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government in 1999 with the AIADMK supremo Jayalalithaa withdrawing support from his government is a fresh example of how the 'melting pot' can impact the entire government machinery. The feud between Indira Gandhi and the grand old stalwarts of INC that resulted in the formation of INC (Organization) and INC (Requisitionist) in 1969 or the anti-Congress agenda that came up with the Janata Party government of 1977** also shows the dynamics of the Indian politics and the lust for power. While the Rajiv Gandhi government brought in path-breaking reforms in the technological sector but to woo the Muslim vote bank, it overturned the verdict of the Supreme Court in **Shah Bano alimony case** and passed the **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986** and thus got into the annals of history as a leader who sacrificed the rights of women for his political greed.

Thus, on one hand where the cardinal and fundamental principles of the constitution bind us together, the democratic exercise of elections turns to be the **melting pot** of various dynamics but on the other hand the fragments of regionalism and vote bank too remain that are mostly accompanied by vested interests of the politicians. **The coalition governments of 1989 and 1990** and fronts like **National Front (1989-1991) and United Front (1996-1998)** also reflect the short-lived periods of power in Indian elections. **Freebies like free laptops and mobiles and welfare schemes like Amma Canteen as in Tamil Nadu or social issues like Ram Mandir and Triple Talaq** also play a vital role in Indian elections. **Thus, elections in India is a melting pot of various dynamics and inspite of all the lacunae, the Indian system is working because of the assimilation of cultures and the feeling of unison that binds us together in this 'melting pot' of Indian democracy.**