

## **Evolution of Electoral System of India**

After India attained Independence in August 1947, there was a need to hold General Elections to elect a truly representative Government on the basis of universal adult suffrage. Article 324, which provides for the setting up of Election Commission as an independent constitutional authority, was therefore brought into force from November 26th, 1949, whereas, most of the other provisions were made effective from January 26th, 1950 (when the Constitution of India became effective).

Election Commission was formally constituted on January 25th, 1950, a day before India became as Sovereign Democratic Republic. The First Chief Election Commissioner, Shri Sukumar Sen, was appointed on March 21st, 1950.

The Commission functioned as a single member body from 1950 to October 16th, 1989 but was converted into a three member body on October 16th, 1989 to January 1st, 1990. In the year 1990, January 1st, it was reverted to the system of single member body. However, since October 1st, 1993, the Commission is regularly functioning as a three member body.

The Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners are given the same salary and allowances as of a Judge of the Supreme Court. All the three Commissioners have equal powers in decision making and in case of any difference of opinion on any issue, the decision is taken by the majority. The term of the office of CEC and ECs is six years or till the age of 65, whichever is earlier.

For the purpose of first General Elections to the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas, the first delimitation order was issued by President, in consultation with Election Commission and with the approval of Parliament on August 13th, 1951.

To provide a legal framework for the conduct of elections, Parliament passed the first Act on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1950 (Representation of the People Act, 1950) providing mainly for the preparation of electoral rolls and second Act on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1951 (Representation of the People Act, 1951) laying down the procedure for the conduct of elections to both Houses of Parliament and Vidhan Sabhas for each State.

Electoral Rolls for constituencies were published in all States by November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1951. The total number of voters (excluding J&K) was 17,32,13,635 as against the total population of India (excluding J&K), 35,66,91,760 according to 1951 census. The first General Elections to the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas were held between October, 1951 and March, 1952. The first Lok Sabha consisting of 497 members was constituted on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1952. The first Rajya Sabha consisting of 216 members was constituted on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1952.

After the constitution of the two Houses of Parliament and the State Legislative Assemblies, the first Presidential election was held in May, 1952 and the first duly elected President assumed the charge of office on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1952. At the time of the first General Election in 1951-52, the Commission had recognized 14 political parties as multi-state parties

and 39 parties as the state parties. Presently, there are seven recognized National Party and 40 State Party.

For the first and second General Elections in 1951-52, and 1957, the Election Commission adopted the 'Balloting System' of voting. Under this system, every candidate was allotted a separate ballot box at each polling station in a screened compartment and the voter was required only to drop his ballot paper, the centrally pre-printed ballot papers into the ballot box of the candidate of his choice.

From the 3<sup>rd</sup> General Elections in 1962 onwards, the Commission switched over to 'marking system' of voting. Under this system, a common ballot paper containing the names and election symbols of all contesting candidates is printed on which the voter has to put a mark with an arrow cross mark rubber stamp on or near the symbol of the candidate of his choice. All the marked ballot papers are put into a common ballot box.

The Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were used for the first time in part of Parur Assembly Constituency in Kerala in 1982, on experimental basis. Later, the extensive use of EVMs started in 1998. The EVMs were used at all polling stations in the country in the 14<sup>th</sup> General Elections to the Lok Sabha in 2004 for the first time. Since then all elections to Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies have been held using EVMs.

Since 1951-52, fifteen General Elections have been held to the Lok Sabha and 348 General Elections to the Vidhan Sabhas and the country is now fully geared for the 16<sup>th</sup> country wide general elections to Lok Sabha .

(Source: PIB)