

Political Literacy Campaign

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Abstract: India is a democratic country where elections and formation of Government takes place after every five years. It is not a new process for Indians. Elections for formation of Local Self Government, State Assemblies, Lok Sabha are held after every five years. Along with this they have to cast the votes in various local organisations. These local cooperative organizations include Cooperative Sugar factories, Cooperative milk dairies, Cooperative banks, “VIKAS” societies, that are almost in every village and the like. Due to all these organizations mostly cooperative, elections do take place on regular basis. Hence the voters of our country on an average cast their votes on annual basis for one or the other organization.

During the time of election, politicians remain busy in devising the tricks and gullies to woo an unsuspecting yet wary Indian electorate. Aren't we tired of not having a stable local self-governance? How long can we keep spending crores and crores of money without the proper people's representative in the local government system? The hard-earned money of the people collected through various forms of taxes is spent by the officers, instead of spending it through the representatives of local self-government. It looks like the luxury of having a new government official operating for the local self-government every now and then is a privilege to the underprivileged Indian masses. Can't we put a little thought and wisdom into our votes, so that it goes to the right and deserving candidates and a party? Isn't it high time people, especially those, who are most vulnerable target and vote banks of self-seeking politicians see the holiness and hypocrisy of politicians? Unlike the assembly elections, illusive memorandums will continue in full swing through the false promises of various schemes made by the ruling parties. On the other hand, the opposition parties will be attacked through various law and order enforcement institutions and instruments that were once used for maintaining peace and prosperity. In such a situation, the responsibility lies with the conscious citizens/ conscious voters.

The Political Literacy Campaign (hence forth PLC) would be the first step towards creating awareness among the voters and helping them to think, judge and decide for themselves. The second step would be to establish the voters forum. These people's organization

will bring awareness among the voters regarding whom to vote for and why, keeping in mind past lessons and the present scenario. This paper is expected to shade light on the need and importance of PLC.

Key words: Political Literacy; Campaign; Local self-government; Underprivileged; Illiteracy

I. INTRODUCTION

Political literacy campaign is one of a powerful mechanism, to be used for a perennial goal of good governance. Many countries are practicing political literacy campaigns for sustainable and transparent government. For saving the huge expenses for mid election process it is necessary to make voters aware and sensitive to choose the people's representative, who is really deserving and have desires for serving the citizens from their constituencies. Due to ignorance, illiteracy and poverty of the general public they are easy target and victims of exploitation and are been found cheated by the politicians, who consider them as vote banks. The votes of these people decide the fate of politician and their political parties and eventually as to who should lead the country. It seems that all sorts of development activities are kept on hold and the voters are taken for granted due to political uncertainty and mudslinging among the ruling class. They have brought shame upon the nation and its citizens.

The rulers are expected to fulfill the promises which are made during the election period. They have the duty to formulate and implement policies that will resolve the problems of the people and create conducive atmosphere that will make it possible for everyone to live properly. The opposition is expected to be more aware and expose the inefficiency of the rulers. The rulers, realizing that they have got thumping majority, should fulfill the responsibility of giving due participation to the representatives of the

minority in the decision-making process. They need to develop the skills of governance by combining the issues raised by the opposition, the warnings received from experts, the difficulties experienced by the common people, and their own policies. However, the reality at the Gram Panchayat, Taluka Panchayat, Zilla Parishad, Municipal-State-Central levels is far from these ideal expectations. There is a world of differences between the empty promises and unrealistic activism before being elected and after election.

This is for the first time after waiting for long, voters have to queue up before the polling booths and sweat it out in the sun, dust or rain to elect their most promising representatives and bring people's self-government to power at village, taluka and district levels. Soon we will find candidate standing at our doorstep with that too familiar deceptive smile. Let us not get carried away, by their smile and hollow promises. At the same time there is a rush to enter the party with power on the eve of elections. When leaving one's own party and joining another party, the ideology of the party and its track record are least important than the hope that if one joins the opposite party, one will get an election ticket, later a ministerial post, or even the chairmanship of some corporation. Politicians do not have the honesty and courage to admit this open secret publicly. The party in which they have spent their lives is criticized. Until yesterday, they were criticizing the leaders who joined their party. They were going to present evidence of corruption and put them behind the bars, who have joined hands with them now. There is no morality or ideological commitment in this transaction! The interesting fact is that we the common citizen have to forget all this, and shamelessly hang a garland around the neck of this very leader with a smile!

Then it's all about the elected representatives coming together to form a government. Past experience should teach us that politicians seldom keep their words. Voters are led by the nose and taken for a ride and dumped after the election. What a travesty of democracy? What a mockery of the people and their dignity as citizens. Once the votes are cast and elections are over the very same politicians tend to forget all about the masses and their problems.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLC

The efforts of the PLC would be to seek active participation of the common people in the electoral process and mobilize them to get out and vote for the right candidate. Help them to think and judge for themselves and exercise their votes carefully and wisely, as their future is in the hands of those, whom they elect to represent them. All this said, what is the frame of mind set with which people go to the polling booths? What is it, that takes them to the polling booth to cast their votes? What is their inducement to vote? What are the hopes and expectations?

People look up on their leaders as the legendary Robinhood, who could fight for their rights. They lay their trust in him and vote for him, with the belief that their security and wellbeing rests with the person who represents them, that their leader would protect their rights no matter by hook or crook or even by impinging upon the rights of others. People vote out of a mixed feeling of fear of Gunda elements who themselves would be candidates contesting elections or are supporters of candidate or parties.

Votes are sometimes cast in return of money. They believe whichever party may come to power it wouldn't make any difference for them. They see neither harm, nor any good, in giving their votes for whoever the person is or whichever the party is, that would give them money or any kind of material help. Few people walk to the polling booth due to sense of duty or because they are particular about exercising their voting rights. It's not always proper judgment or political discretion or wisdom that leads people to the polling booth. Hence to prevent this and to bring sustainable government leading to good governance it is necessary to organize Political Literacy Campaigns.

It is a usual comment made by the voters what will happen if, I, as a single person don't cast the vote? What change will take place with my single vote? This type of understanding leads towards a major mistake and the candidate who may not be having any vision of development or rather is having vested interest gets elected. The best process of PLC is starting with the small steps. PLC can work out to reach in small pockets and help the people to understand the need to cast vote. "ONE MAN ONE VOTE" is the value we

are protecting, a sense of duty and responsibility towards the nation. Instead of arranging tours and enjoying the holiday on the voting day. PLC can help to prevent such situation.

Every year new voters register their name in electoral list. These new voters play an important role in election and later in formation of government. PLC plays an important role in helping these newly enrolled voters to choose the deserving peoples representative. Manifesto of political party can be a major source to help new voters to understand the vision of political party. PLC need to use various sources to reach out to these new voters and bring awareness among them. Higher Secondary Schools, Senior Colleges, Youth Mandals especially the network developed by Nehru Yuva Kendra throughout nation where large number of youths are working for nation building can take up the task of PLC. They can help people to decide whom to elect as their representative and also to understand the realities of political parties and the role played by political leaders.

PLC can be used as an effective tool for development of our nation. More than 50% of our population happens to be in the dormant state when it comes to political wisdom and awareness. Those who do not vote at all have a negative approach to the whole electoral process and have rather chosen to stay away in resignation. Those who don't cast the votes in spite of being educated and well informed have in fact lost confidence in the electoral exercise. On the contrary many cast their votes not for the present merit of a politician or a party. They idolize in a fanatic manner living or dead, political personalities or blindly follow age old ideology and principles of one or the other political party. The decision to vote among such people is unfortunately not based upon the creditability and merits of their contemporary political leaders or their representative parties. The tendency of the people to ideal worship not to say the dynastic obsession, is exploited by self-seeking politicians to forward their own interest or their parties.

Instead of addressing basic values, opportunistic leaders play political trump cards to rope in votes. There has already been too much lip service and too little action. The common man has little to do with the mudslinging among leaders and parties over various

issues like for instance the question of nationality of some political leader among others. Or the issue of language and its implementation. Firing salvos at each other over issues that are not concerns of common man pass over the heads of the Indian masses. And in no way does it have anything to do with the day-today lives or burning problems of the people. On the other hand, leaders and parties scare you with the impending problems of unemployment and poverty as something that would devour you unless you vote for the party that it claims can solve the problem, with some quick fix. After winning the elections, when it's time to deliver the goods, they get away, saying population explosion is the cause behind these problems. Here again the common man is left high and dry like a proverbial donkey to be kicked after being used. Successive governments have come to power but the issues long pending to be overcome like combating disease, hunger, poverty, illiteracy, discrimination against women, environmental degradation and Farmers Suicide have a long way to go.

The political literacy championship seeks to highlight issues which concern the masses most. Educational institutions including the social work colleges can join hands and play a significant role in helping the masses to break the chain of solitude, open their eyes to the hypocrisy of the "political well-wishers and saviors" of people. Votes casted for the right candidate would ensure right governance. Candidates should stop taking people for granted and address core issues of genuine relevance concerning the day to day lives and wellbeing of the public.

Political literacy campaign is intended to put an end to the practice of voting and waiting for, in vain, for something that never comes by. Promises are made but never kept. Have you ever realized the value of your vote? That it decides the future of your Nation, and its people? That you have every right to question those who have been elected by you, if they don't keep the words?

In a democratic system of government, if the ruling party, instead of exercising power legally, is going to indulge in corruption and environmental destruction and thus gain power, then it is the responsibility of the common citizens to bring them to book. The upper class, who get a share of the power among the citizens

enjoy it to earn economic milage, and are not much involved in this. The poor, who are struggling for two ends to meet, do not have time to understand all this. At such a time, the middle class, who recites verses of morality and ethics, will have to put aside their partisan commitment and use their ability to judge parties on merit. Others will also have to be included in this. As conscious citizens, we will have to take the initiative to elect more suitable representatives at the time of elections.

Vote for the right person for the right reason would be a right step in right direction. The voters forum would strive to create awareness among the people and convince them that they have a say in the future of their motherland. That they should not allow anyone to lead them by the nose or take them for roller coaster ride. They should identify the ship in the wolf skin. If the objectives of the forum have to be released it requires the whole hearted cooperation and participation of all concerned. Among the activities of the political literacy campaign are street plays, songs, poster display and audio-visual programs along with the social media tools, that will be helpful to aware and awaken the masses.

REFERENCES

This is a concept paper. Author has shared the views in this article based on his experience and dialogue with the voters.