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**ONE NATION - ONE ELECTION**- Hema Gariya & Tisha Sharma<sup>1</sup>

**Research question** -Is the Implementation of One Nation, One Election Feasible in India, Considering Constitutional, Logistical, and Political Factors?

***Abstract***

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This research paper analyzes the potential implementation of the 'One Nation, One Election' model in the Indian electoral system, by focusing on constitutional, logistical, and political factors. By analyzing the historical evolution of India's electoral framework, it aims to unveil the underlying constitutional fabric and discern the adaptability of existing legal structures. The logistical aspect delves into the practical challenges of synchronizing elections, evaluating the feasibility of electoral infrastructure and potential roadblocks in its implementation. The study further navigates the complex political landscape, examining participants' perspectives, potential benefits, and issues surrounding this proposed reform. By using a nuanced approach, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges associated with 'One Nation, One Election'.

**INTRODUCTION**

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With 900 million eligible voters taking part in the election process, India is the largest democracy in the world. It involves two different types of elections, direct and indirect for different levels of government, including the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament), Rajya Sabha (upper house), state legislative assemblies, and local governing bodies<sup>2</sup>. The fundamental building block of this democratic system is the Indian Constitution, which carefully establishes a federal structure and distributes powers between the center and state governments.

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The Election Commission of India plays an important role in ensuring the reliability and integrity of the electoral process. The ECI was established as an independent, permanent body, which is crucial to the supervision of elections at all three levels of government center, state, and local levels. Its responsibilities include directing, supervising, and controlling<sup>3</sup> the entire electoral process which includes supervision of the registration of voters, nominations for potential candidates, surveys, and vote counting. In addition to supervising elections, it also regulates political parties and electoral expenditures. Accordingly, the ECI regulates the use of funds during election campaigns and maintains an eye on political parties' activities to ensure that they follow electoral guidelines with the goal of implementing fairness and transparency in the electoral process is the major goal.

Since the very first general election that took place in 1951–1952, the elections for the Lok Sabha are scheduled to take place every five years, unless it gets called off prematurely. Having an incredible turnout of over 67% in the recent election in 2019, it was clarified that the Indian voters were playing an active role in the election cycle. However, the state assembly elections tend to create, an ongoing process of election setup as they fall outside of the five-year electoral cycle's consistency, this ongoing process of the elections causes problems of costs and disrupts the governance in the country. For example, the general and state elections that took place in 2019 were held in 7 phases, and 1-5 phases deploying millions of polling staff and other requirements for monitoring the elections throughout the country creating a lot of financial burden on the government.

It is there that Indian elections over the past few decades have repeatedly shown a tendency for anti-incumbency and an active multiparty discipline. The scattered election schedule, however, presents challenges and poses questions about the efficiency of administration, the cost of elections, and voter fatigue. In addition, during simultaneous state elections, this arrangement gives the central government enormous influence over the resources of the state. Different Committees like the Law Commission report in 1983 and 1999, the Parliamentary Standing Committee Report, the Niti Ayog Report, etc. have been looking into a number of electoral reform proposals, such as switching to proportional representation, permitting citizens to recall politicians, as well as offering public funding out of them a much-debated idea is 'One Nation, One Election,' which aims to align national and state election timeframes. It is argued that with this modification, the problems with the current fragmented system will be resolved and the electoral process will be simplified. Thus, the focus of the current debate on electoral reforms in India is on creating a reasonable and efficient approach.

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<sup>3</sup> The Constitution of India 1950, A.324

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## **1-ONE NATION ONE ELECTION**

"One Nation, One Election" is a political concept that advocates synchronizing the election processes for different levels of government within a nation. In the case of India, it advocates simultaneous elections for all state legislative assemblies and the Lok Sabha, the lower house of Parliament, this concept does not necessarily mean that the elections need to be conducted on the same day throughout the nation however it can be conducted in a phase wise manner in terms of elections for both state and center, where the voters in the country would be able to cast their votes for two different elections on the same day<sup>4</sup>. The main objective of this is to achieve enhanced administrative efficiency, monetary savings, and improved stability in governance by simplifying the electoral process and reducing the number of elections however, this is seen as problematic and a potential obstacle to the federal system and its feasibility of implementation. On the other hand, it is also argued that conducting elections at various levels concurrently will improve policy consistency and planning for the future.

## **2-SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS IN INDIA**

This concept is not new to India, as the Simultaneous general elections for state assemblies and the central level were held simultaneously in 1952, 1957, 1962, and 1967 after independence. However, after 1967 due to premature dissolution of state assemblies, defection from one party to another<sup>5</sup>, the proclamation of the emergency<sup>6</sup>, and various other non-political reasons the synchronizing of the election was impacted. For example, this variation can be seen in the Lok Sabha elections that were held in 1977, for which the voting was carried out in 1970, however, it was postponed for more than two years in 1975<sup>7</sup>. In the year 1983, the idea of simultaneous elections was advocated by the Election Commission in its annual report followed up by the Law Commission in year 1999<sup>8</sup> stating that separate elections should be kept as an exception rather than the rule. The push came to the idea in year 2014, when the BJP

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<sup>4</sup>Asaduddin Owaisi, 'Simultaneous elections will undermine the Constitution, weaken democracy, and annihilate regional parties. Administrative convenience or expense can't be an excuse', Hindustan times, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/india-must-reject-the-one-nation-one-election-idea-101615558600563.html> (last accessed on 18 November, 2023).

<sup>5</sup>The Constitution of India 1956, TENTH SCHEDULE, para 2.

<sup>6</sup> The Constitution of India 1956, A.356.

<sup>7</sup>Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai, 'A discussion paper on Analysis of simultaneous elections: the "what", "why" and "how"', Niti Ayog, available at <https://www.spmrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Note-on-Simultaneous-Elections.pdf> (last accessed on November 15th, 2023)

<sup>8</sup>170th Report of the Law Commission of India, 'Reform of Electoral Laws'(1999).

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government came up with it in its election manifesto. After it in the year 2017 Niti Aayog<sup>9</sup> and Law Commission in 2018 came up with their skeleton structure recommending “five constitutional recommendations” in order to implement the notion of “one nation one election”.

The recommended amendments were in terms of –

- Article 83 - The term of the House of Parliament shall of 5 years unless it gets dissolved earlier
- Article 85 - The dissolution of Lok Sabha by the president.
- Article 172- The span of the state legislature shall be 5 years unless it gets dissolved earlier.
- Article 174- Dissolution of the state legislature.
- Article 356 - State emergency and president’s rule in the state.
- The Representation of People Act, 1951 Act

### **3- NEED FOR ELECTION REFORMS (SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS) IN INDIA**

Within the framework of Indian democracy, the need for simultaneous elections emerges as a fundamental debate that addresses the complex issues presented by present election cycles. Concerns regarding how periodic elections will disrupt administration, resource allocation, and policy continuity have contributed to the need for synchronized elections. In an effort to eliminate the ongoing electoral mode that restricts effective government and keeps attention on growth initiatives, simultaneous elections have been suggested as an achievable option.

Following are the basis on which the simultaneous elections have been argued by the 79<sup>Th</sup> Report of Parliamentary Standing Committee, 2015 on their report “Feasibility of holding simultaneous elections to the House of the People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative Assemblies” -

- **Administrative Efficiency:** Conducting elections at India's many levels of government disrupts regular governance activities and requires an enormous number of administrative resources. The purpose of simultaneous elections is to have smaller polls more often, which could enhance administrative effectiveness and offer a more specific agenda for governance.

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<sup>9</sup>Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai, ‘A discussion paper on Analysis of simultaneous elections: the “what”, “why” and “how”’, Niti Ayog, available at <https://www.spmrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Note-on-Simultaneous-Elections.pdf>(last accessed on November 15th, 2023)

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- **Cost efficient:** Conducting several elections requires large expenditures for things like security, preparation, and advertisement. Lower expenses are anticipated with simultaneous elections because resources can be aggregated for one election rather than distributed over multiple.
- **Stability and Continuity of Policy:** Regular elections can cause uncertainty in the government by encouraging political leaders and parties to prioritize short-term electoral ambitions over long-term policy preparations. By ensuring governments have an established term, simultaneous elections aim to encourage stability by enhancing policy uniformity and implementation.
- **Minimizing Disruptions:** The Model Code of Conduct is often enforced alongside elections, limiting the government's ability to make decisions during this period. Simultaneous elections would end up in fewer disruptions in the code of conduct, promoting an improved environment for governance.
- **Voter Fatigue:** Recurrent election cycles may give rise to voter fatigue, which decreases the level of involvement with the electoral process. By reducing the total number of voting events, simultaneous elections might resolve this issue and possibly increase voter participation as well as informed decision-making.
- **Focus on Development:** It is also contended that organizing concurrent elections could set up political leaders and parties to focus on issues related to development rather than perpetually in election preparation. This could promote the implementation of development policies and more efficient administration.

#### **4-FEASIBILITY OF IMPLEMENTING “ONE NATION ONE ELECTION” IN INDIA**

The execution of "One Nation, One Election" in India is a complicated matter. For this, amendments to the constitution are of the utmost importance and need wide political backing. In addition, coordinating several state election schedules logistically poses various challenges. In order to make it successful a careful examination is required in the context of potential degradation of federalism, massive educational campaigns are required since public awareness plays an important role. Further experimental programs in a few states could provide insights about its implementation.

#### **5-IMPACT ON DEMOCRACY**

In Kihoto Hollohan, the Supreme Court held that “Democracy is a part of the basic structure of our Constitution, and rule of law and free and fair elections are basic features of democracy. One of the

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postulates of free and fair elections is provision for resolution of election disputes as also adjudication of disputes relating to subsequent disqualifications by an independent authority....35”<sup>10</sup>

Although the idea of one nation one election seems to be a good idea, however, the implementation of it can cause a challenge for democracy. for example, if the elections in 2024 were to take place according to the concept of one nation one election, the state assemblies be either required to dissolve or compelled to dissolve before the duration or the situation be there that the president's rule would be imposed in the state. This condition can lead to the state of destruction of democracy because the Constitution of India provides that the assemblies need to complete their tenure until the conditions arise of a no-confidence moment or the failure of the constitutional machinery in the state.

In addition, this implementation can even go against the rules led down in the case of *S.R Bommai*<sup>11</sup> where it was held that the proclamation of presidential rule by the president is not absolute. It further puts a major question on the time period for which the presidential rule is going to be imposed in the country.

Secondly, considering our nation's democratic system, simultaneous elections appear impossible. Suppose that simultaneous elections are held and that there's no assurance that there would be a full majority at both at the center as well as at each state. There is a strong likelihood that a few parties are going to establish an alliance government, which might fall apart at any point before the five-year period ends. Thus, there is an opportunity for re-election throughout all levels, which will undoubtedly cause unrest without cause.

### **IMPACT ON FEDERALISM**

One nation-one election could have implications on the federal structure of India, like in the case of centralization of power by providing excess power to the central government, which later can cause political imbalances when the single party dominates both centers as well as the state, and further can also impact the state autonomy as each state has its own socio-political issues like conducting elections for the local bodies which includes municipalities, panchayats, and other grassroots levels. This is seen as a major drawback because the elections for the local bodies are conducted by the state election commission provided under A. 243k of the constitution rather than the national election commission and in addition different states have their own systems for conducting the local body elections within their states<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup>Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachilhu, AIR 1993 SC 412

<sup>11</sup>S. R. Bommai v. Union of India ([1994] 2 SCR 64

<sup>12</sup>The Constitution of India 1950, Schedule 7 Entry 5, List II.

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Furthermore, the duration of these elections is similar to the duration of the state assemblies, and no provisions are mentioned for preparing or dissolving these elections compared to the state assemblies in the constitution. A. 243 E and A.243U explicitly mention that the panchayat municipalities cannot be dissolved. That is how these reasons make it difficult to synchronize the elections of local levels to the state elections or of Lok Sabha.

### **6.3 COST SAVING IMPACTS**

In accordance with a Parliamentary Committee report, conducting all of the nation's elections simultaneously will not only reduce the burden on the election commission but also the expenditure of the Political parties. This concept is the contemporary need of the nation, as we know every year there are several elections taking place somewhere in the country which affects administrative tasks and also acts as a burden on political parties. If the idea is implemented it is going to alter the trajectory of the nation because it will save money and time by eliminating the requirement for several elections. For Example,

#### **EXPENSES OF EC ON LOK SABHA ELECTIONS**

year	Expenses in (crores)
1952	10.45
1957	5.9
1962	7.32
1967	10.79
1971	11.6

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1977	23.03
1980	54.77
1989	154.22
1991	359.1
1996	597.34
1998	666.22
1999	947.68
2004	1016.08
2009	1114.38
2014	3870.34
2019	6500

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**EXPENSES OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE LOK SABHA ELECTIONS**

Year	Total expenditure (in crore)
1998	9000
1999	10000
2004	14000
2009	20000
2014	30000
2019	60000

By implementing “One nation one election” the expenditure by the government can be optimized and rationalized in the following areas-

- In arrangements of the different polling stations
- Procurement of electronic machines at a lower cost, which are currently procured separately.
- In terms of printing, preparation, and distribution of electoral materials
- In terms of the polling staff allowances
- In terms of employing security

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## **6-ADVANTAGES OF THE ONE NATION ONE ELECTION**

### **6.1-MORE FOCUSED GOVERNMENT**

In the present electoral system, the political parties in power mainly prefer populist policies compared to nationalist ones because they assume that granting personal advantages like benefits such as loan waivers, welfare pensions, free housing, energy, food subsidies, etc is the easiest route for appealing votes. In S.

*Subramaniam Balaji*<sup>13</sup> it was held by the SC that these kinds of practices in politics act as a failure of free and fair elections and it is highly important to have electoral reforms, like synchronizing elections which can reduce these kinds of practices.

The another claim supporting synchronizing election cycles is that it allows state administrations more time for being a concentrated governing body rather than a continuously campaigning body. According to the current model, along with the Lok Sabha elections conducted every five years, elections are held in almost every state. As a consequence State governments are under tremendous strain to always function in campaign mode because of this, state governments continue to get diverted from carrying out an effective policy agenda in favor of competitive nationalism and election-driven suggestions.

The number of available periods for the government will be substantially greater with simultaneous elections, as there will be fewer interruptions due to election pressure. In the situation that state elections for both the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha are scheduled together, the incumbent state governments will also get a fixed time period.

### **6.2-CONSISTENT POLICIES AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

The inconsistency of policies, strategies, and economic reforms at the state level in India is often attributed to the country's frequent election cycle. To enhance their chances of winning elections, governments are often obliged to go off track and alter their approach to development.

Policy consistency can be accomplished through synchronizing state and Lok Sabha elections. Under the present arrangement, governments in office are compelled to make decisions focused more on short-term impacts on elections than on the long-term effects on policies. This often induces program shifts and interruptions. For example, the previous government initiatives and plans get terminated as a result of changes in the regime of succeeding elections. After simultaneous elections, the State administrations

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<sup>13</sup>S. Subramaniam Balaji v. Government of Tamil Nadu & Ors., (2013) 9 SCC 659

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may create policies and programs with greater developmental intentions as a priority because simultaneous polls offer extended terms free from electoral impacts.

## **7- DISADVANTAGES OF IMPLEMENTING SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS IN INDIA**

### **7.1 DOMINATION OF THE NATIONAL ISSUES COMPARED TO REGIONAL-LEVEL ISSUES IN THE STATE**

By synchronizing elections, at different levels, the political language tends to become more homogenized, with a concentration on major national problems by taking them as a priority during a combined electoral process. Under such circumstances, localized or regional problems that might be of greater importance for specific regions or communities might get less attention from political parties, the press, and voters as they become more focused on broader national subjects.

Several factors could be contributing to this domination of national concerns. One can be the political parties are encouraged to match their campaigns with broader national issues so as to appeal to a broader spectrum of voters. Therefore, in political campaigns and discussions, regional issues could end up neglected, as the regional parties would have space to showcase their achievements vision, and mission. In addition, during simultaneous elections, media coverage often emphasizes national storylines, sometimes overlooking regional variations. This shift also has an opportunity to shape public opinion and awareness, drawing emphasis away from regional challenges and towards issues of national importance.

Furthermore, in order for regional parties to be competitive, it may be that they may be forced to incorporate their own agendas into broader national agendas. This might dilute regional identities and worries and strengthen the importance of national issues.

### **7.2-LESSOPPORTUNITY FOR THE VOTERS TO SHOW THEIR DISSATISFACTION**

Through synchronizing elections, voters will lose the chance to express their dissatisfaction with the present government at the state, because of the voting at the same time. This is because the voters are able to differentiate between the performance of central and state governments under the present model and have the opportunity to remove the state governance if they are dissatisfied even if the Centre continues to function smoothly. On the other hand, when elections for the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha are held simultaneously, state governments' election performance is linked to the public's perception of the central government. If elections are synchronized, voters who are dissatisfied with their state government are unable to remove it from power without voting against the center.

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### **7.3- DEDUCTION IN THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE LONG RUN GOVERNMENT**

A common concern regarding the synchronization of the elections at the central and state levels is that it might extend the ruling time period for the particular party, leading to a decrease in the accountability of that government. Under the present system, the state elections are interspersed with the elections for the central government due to which pressure is made on the national governments, pushing them to fulfill economic obligations towards the state. However, this might be reduced due to the synchronizing of the elections.

### **8-CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, an in-depth examination of the constitutional, logistical, and political aspects of the "One Nation, One Election" implementation in India has revealed an intricate situation that requires thoughtful consideration.

Analysis of the constitutional element has shown that changes and careful negotiation between federalism and a single election process are required. In regard to logistics, the intricate network of operational difficulties which include synchronized voter lists as well as dependable infrastructure has been thoroughly investigated, highlighting the importance of careful planning. In addition, the study emphasizes how important it is to invest in voter education, administrative resources, and technological infrastructure in order to ensure the smooth functioning of synchronized polls. The results reflect an actual assessment of the logistical difficulties, emphasizing the necessity of pilot programs and a phased-in implementation.

In order to implement amendments to the Constitution requires an in-depth comprehension of what constitutes the spirit of democratic representation and the power of the federal government.

Further, political parties' varying opinions and points of view have been recognized, which emphasizes the importance of fostering a national conversation to reach a consensus. The study suggests that in order to address concerns and win support for the big project, an in-depth and inclusive discussion is needed.

Therefore, even while the concept of "**One Nation, One Election**" is in line with successful resource management and governance, bringing it into practice requires an in-depth understanding of the intricate structure of Indian democracy.

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In accordance with the country's democratic values, a more complex, deliberate, and gradual approach should be there rather than, rather than just rejecting the idea altogether. Hence this study recommends that the government should proceed carefully and inclusively with the goal of guaranteeing the success to any attempt toward synchronized elections, as India works through the challenges of reforming its electoral system.

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