

One Nation One Election: Benefits are more for India

Dr. C. Santha

MA, M.Phil, PhD, Coimbatore, India

Abstract: *This idea of One Nation One Election was earlier placed before the nation by former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. One nation one election is a debatable issue that is the reason even Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked for national debate on this issue before execution of such kind of electoral reform. India is called the largest democratic country of the world because china is the communist country despite most populous country. The general elections for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies are held at the gap of five years. But it is observed that election is a whole year process in the India. Government spends a lot money, time and energy on the conduct of different elections.*

Keywords: One Nation, One Election, Policy, Democracy, India

1. Introduction

The One Nation eloquence seems to be keystone for all new initiative of the Indian Government. The goods and service tax (GST) come out as “One Nation, One Tax” idea. In the field of education New Education Policy “One Nation One Curriculum” and “one nation one ration card” constructs. Likewise the notion of “**One Nation One Election**” is a call for simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and all State legislatures. The simultaneous elections are not a new concept in India. After the Independence and enforcement of constitution, the first election which was held at 1952 was conducted simultaneous. Elections were held simultaneous during 1952 till 1967 afterwards it got disrupted. The concept end when fourth Lok Sabha was dissolve early. The ideal condition require that an honest and upright person who is public spirited and want to serve the people, should be able contest and get elected as peoples representative. Until now several Electoral bodies conduct elections under Article 324 of the Constitution mandates the Election Commission of India to supervise, direct and control elections to the offices of President, Vice President, both house of the Parliament, State Legislative Council and Assemblies. Article 73 and 74 facilitate State Election Commission (SEC), these bodies conduct elections at Central and State level in every 5 years. The “idea of One Nation One Election” in India is a proposed electoral reform advocated by current Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Indian

democracy has its federal structure where centre and state governments enjoy their rights and responsibilities.

History of “One Nation One Election” in India

History of “One Nation One Election” in India If someone thinks that the concept of “One Nation One Election” is new for India then it is wrong because “One Nation One Election” is not a unique experiment in our country.

The first general elections to Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies were held together in 1951-52. That practice continued over three subsequent general elections held in the years- 1957, 1962 and 1967. However, due to the premature dissolution of some Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969, the cycle got disrupted for the first time. In 1970, Fourth Lok Sabha was itself dissolved prematurely and fresh elections held in 1971. Thus, First, Second and Third Lok Sabha enjoyed full five year terms.

The term of Fifth Lok Sabha was extended till 1977 under Article 352. After that, the Eighth, Tenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Lok Sabha could complete their full five year terms. Sixth, Seventh, Ninth, Eleventh, Twelfth and Thirteenth Lok Sabha were dissolved prematurely. Various State Assemblies also faced similar issues over a period of time. As a result of all such premature dissolutions and extension, the cycle of simultaneous elections has been firmly disrupted. The table below presents the timelines of key milestones of various Lok Sabhas till date.

Lok Sabha	Last date of poll	Date of constitution of Lok Sabha	Date of First sitting	Date of expiration of term (Article 83 (2) of Constitution)	Date dissolution of Lok Sabha	Overall Term (in days) (Col 6-Col 4)	Overall Term (approx)
First	21-Feb-52	21-Feb-52	13-May-52	12-May-57	04-Apr-57	1787	5 Year
Second	15-Mar-57	05-Apr-57	10-May-57	09-May-62	31-Mar-62	1786	5 Year
Third	25-Feb-62	02-Apr-62	16-Apr-62	15-Apr-67	03-Mar-67	1782	5 Year
Fourth	21-Feb-67	04-Mar-67	16-Mar-67	15-Mar-72	27-Dec-70	1382*	3 Year & 10 Months
Fifth	10-Mar-71	15-Mar-71	19-Mar-71	18-Mar-77	18-Jan-77	2132**	5 Year & 10 Months
Sixth	20-Mar-77	23-Mar-77	25-Mar-77	24-Mar-82	22-Aug-79	880*	2 Year & 5 Months
Seventh	06-Jan-80	10-Jan-80	21-Jan-80	20-Jan-85	31-Dec-84	1806	5 Year
Eighth	28-Dec-84	31-Dec-84	15-Jan-84	14-Jan-90	27-Nov-89	1777	5 Year
Ninth	26-Nov-89	02-Dec-89	18-Dec-89	17-Dec-94	13-Mar-91	450*	1 Year & 3 Months
Tenth	15-Jun-91	20-Jun-91	09-Jul-91	08-Jul-96	10-May-96	1767	5 Year
Eleventh	07-May-96	15-May-96	22-May-96	21-May-01	04-Dec-97	561*	1 Year & 6 Months
Twelfth	07-Mar-98	10-Mar-98	23-Mar-98	22-Mar-03	26-Apr-99	399*	1 Year & 1 Months

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Thirteenth	04-Oct-99	10-Oct-99	20-Oct-99	19-Oct-04	06-Feb-04	1570*	4 Year & 4 Months
Fourteenth	10-May-04	17-May-04	02-Jun-04	01-Jun-09	18-May-09	1811	5 Year
Fifteenth	13-May-09	18-May-09	01-Jun-09	31-May-14	18-May-14	1812	5 Year
Sixteenth	12-May-14	18-May-14	04-Jun-14	03-Jun-19	NA	NA	NA

*Midterm polls were held. Dissolution took place before the elections. **Extension due to proclamation of Emergency.

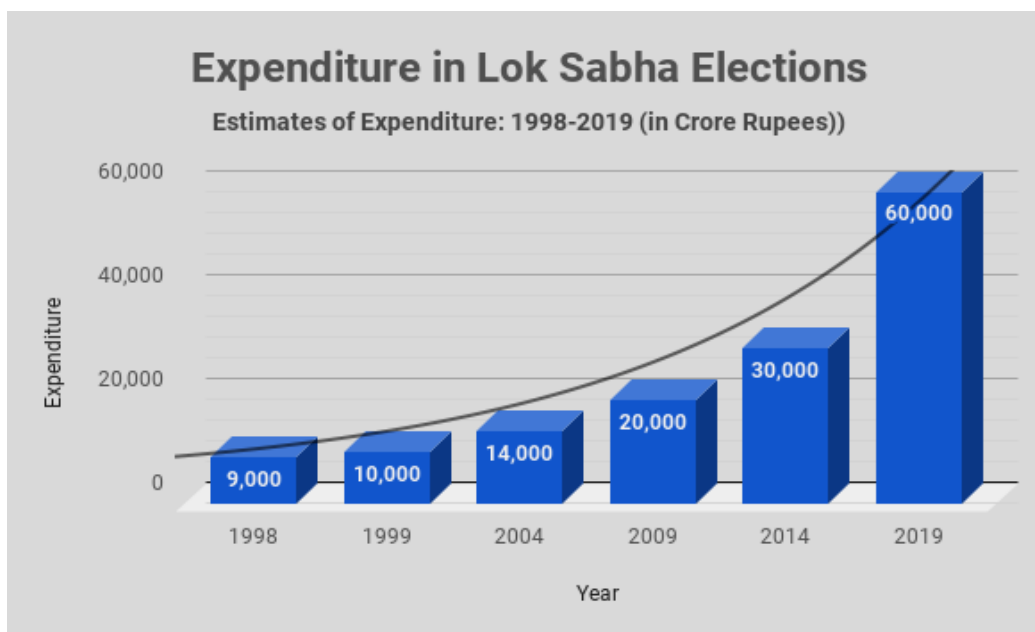
Source: Table – I, Page 2, Report of the Parliamentary Standing committee on Personnel, Public grievances, Law and justice – 79th report (Dec 2015)

One Nation One Election Theory

The greatest rationale in the support of the simultaneous election is the saving of government money. If the country goes for “One Nation One Election” it will save huge amount of money. There are 4120 MLAs in the 31 states and UTs the use limit for assembly election is Rs.28 lacks. It implies that absolute expense would be somewhere around

Rs. 11 billion. Normally around 5 states go for elections each year.

The idea therefore, promises cutting of expenditure on elections which is significant considering its context in a country like India where elections involve an astronomical amount of money.



Source: CMS Analysis & Estimation

“One Nation, One Election” means structuring the Indian election cycle in such a manner that elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies are synchronized together. In such a scenario, a voter would normally cast his/her vote for electing members of Lok Sabha and State Assembly on a single day and at the same time. We all are aware that in 1952, for the first Lok Sabha elections it costed around Rs 11 crore, while in 2014 general elections, the government spent almost Rs 3,870 crore. In 2019, and there was 40% jump from 2014 costing an unprecedented Rs. 50,000 Crores, according to the New Delhi based Centre for Media Studies. And these are just paper records and estimates. Add to this the cost of various incentives like television sets, goats, liquor and other personal goods to influence the voters. It was among the world’s most expensive elections. Preparing and conducting elections costs the public exchequer hundreds of crore each time and the money is mostly spent on arrangements, salaries and security.

The Law Commission headed by Justice B P Jeevan Reddy, in its May 1999 report said, “We must go back to the situation where the elections to Lok Sabha and all the Legislative Assemblies are held at once”. We can save unnecessary wastage of public wealth, shift of focus from governance because of multiple elections, wastage of

security forces, wastage of time for teaches and other bank officers and government officers being appointed as individual booth officials.

Merits of “One Nation One Election”

- Preparing and conducting elections costs the public exchequer hundreds of crore each time. The money is mostly spent on arrangements, salaries and security. Holding simultaneous polls will lead to significant savings of public funds that can be better utilised elsewhere.
- The money saved will help the Government to keep the focus on improving the slowing down economy, healthcare, and education, condition of farmers and not on rallies to be conducted for elections which is conducted in half a dozen states every now and then.
- With elections taking place at ministers are always in election mode. This disrupts and distorts agendas with parties deferring reforms or make decisions with short-term views, thereby depriving citizens of clear policies. Holding simultaneous elections will ensure that the ministers can dedicate a good four years towards implementing politics and doing constructive work for their constituencies.

- If elections are not held frequently, the administration will go ahead with worthwhile plans and development based projects instead of election season focused plans. Even state and central government need not prepare lucrative budget with sops every year and they can take decisions for the development of economy.
- Delays in Government working can be stopped which is caused by repeated conduct of elections. Exchequer incurs colossal labor and money to conduct free and fair elections in the country and states. One Nation One Election concept will help the Schools and universities open on time; educators to work without fear of vacation every now and then. This will have positive on the life of overall population.
- It is an open secret that elections are fought with black money. A huge black turned into white money during elections in the country. So if the elections are conducted throughout the year then there is a possibility that parallel economy will grow in the country.
- All political parties spend large sums of money in ensuring that no stone is left unturned during campaigning. One election every five years across all levels will lower the cost of elections to parties and thus reduce their need for “donations”.
- Other than money, the other significant resource needed in abundance is the deployment of security forces. Holding simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the state legislatures it will free up security forces, which are diverted from their core duties for each election.
- Code of Conduct during election period is imposed and it happens every now and then in one or other state. When the Model Code of Conduct is in force, new projects for public welfare cannot be launched. Accordingly, one time election will ensure continuity in policies, projects and programmes of the central and state governments.

Demerits of “One Nation One Election”

- It is observed that elections for state assemblies and Lok Sabha are fought on different issues. Regional parties target local issues while national parties target national issues. So there is a possibility that regional parties will not be able to raise the local issues strongly.
- Regional parties will not be able to compete with national parties in terms of election expenditure and election strategy. Assembly elections are closely associated with the local issues and local voters. Hence one time election will not be accepted by the regional parties.
- At present when almost all the regional parties are demanding to conduct elections through ballot papers. If elections are conducted in one time mode then the elections results will be declared very late.
- One time election seems almost impossible due to democratic set up of the country. Suppose if elections are conducted simultaneously but it is not sure that all the states and central government will be formed by the full majority. **It is also possible that some parties make alliance government which can fall any time before 5 years.** So there is a possibility of re-election in the whole country.
- As we know that India is the largest democracy in the world so it will be daunting task to conduct simultaneous

election in all the states, UTs and Lok Sabha. According to the Law Commission, if the country goes for simultaneous election then the election commission needs to spend Rs 4,500 crore on new EVMs.

Efforts Made

- The idea, as expected was not well received by the opposition parties striving hard to save their identity in this Modi dominated era. An all party meeting called on by Narendra Modi was attended by only 21 parties. Eleven major parties in the political front of India including Indian National Congress voiced their opinion against this ambitious proposal by skipping the all party meeting on the issue.
- There are no significant examples of countries with a similar federal parliamentary system conducting simultaneous elections like the one proposed by the one nation-one election agenda. The Bharatiya Janata Party has never been averse to change and now making all out efforts to make this plans a reality. It is something the world has never seen and it does pose a few problems as well but if implemented to perfection we might actually see a new resurgent India.

The Constitutional issues with One Nation One Election (ONOE)

The law commission of India was asked to prepare a report last year on simultaneous elections and their feasibility by the government of India. The Commission submitted its reports in August 2018 and said it was in favour of ONOE- however, it also stressed that simultaneous elections are not possible unless there are amendments to the Constitution and to other laws.

The Constitutional issues with ONOE are:

- Articles 83 and 172 of the Constitution, which guarantees five years to every elected Lok Sabha and Assembly respectively, “Unless sooner dissolved”, will have to be amended.
- Articles 85(1) and 174(1) stipulate that the intervening period between the last session of the House of the People / State Legislative Assemblies and the first Session of the subsequent House / Assemblies shall not exceed six months. So if ONOE comes in –what happens if there is a hung Assembly / Parliament situation? What if a government falls due to a no-confidence motion? What if a representative dies one year into their tenure?
- Article 356, which deals with President’s rule, may need to be amended. Article 356 comes into force only if there is a failure of constitutional machinery in a state-so for President’s rule to be put in place for the sake of simultaneous elections is problematic.
- The Tenth Schedule of the Constitution-which is the anti-defection law-will have to be reconsidered if Assemblies and the Lok Sabha must ensure continuous governance for five years, if the ruling party does not have a large mandate.

There are also several other concerns, people who oppose ONOE argue:

- Simultaneous elections are against the federal structure of the Constitution. It forces the voter to think of national and state issues at the same plane and will take away the

gains made by regional parties over the year and favour national parties, they say.

- Amending Articles 174 and 356-which deals with “Provisions in case of failure of constitutional machinery in State”, or President’s rule-will alter the basic structure of the Constitution and will impinge on federalism.
- The international examples given by those pro-ONOE-like Sweden, Belgium and South Africa-cannot be compared to a country like India, whose population and area is many times that of the smaller countries.
- Dilution of Tenth Schedule-the anti-defection law-will lead to house trading.
- ONOE is not feasible: if a central government that is made up of a coalition faces a situation where an ally pulls out and the government falls, elections will have to be conducted in all state government, too, within six month, even if there is no issue in those states and vice-versa.
- Argument about MCC paralyzing policy making is overstated and untrue-it only stops ruling parties from using the government machinery for electoral gains.

New Government Serious on the Issue

- If there is any government in the recent years that can successfully implement the idea of one nation-one election by amending the constitution in the largest democracy of the world it is the present BJP government which retained power with a tally of over 300 seats in the recent Lok sabha polls 2019.
- The vision of the party in power - Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) under the leadership of the country’s Prime-Minister Mr. Narendra Modi is also to set the platform for a development mindset as this system is supposed to set free politicians, government officials and the state resources from the hassle of organizing elections in different parts of the country every year now and then and completely direct the government machinery on solid groundwork rather than needless formalities.

2. Conclusion

The prudence of the policy of “One Nation, One Election”, comes from the fact that it would be a great advantage to the government treasury if simultaneous elections for Lok Sabha and state assemblies are held because a lot money and man power is used in conducting elections and simultaneous elections would save a lot of money and man power. Also, it is expected that the number and percentage of voters actually coming out of their houses to vote would increase if simultaneous are held. These advantages would benefit the country as a whole.

The concept of ‘One Nation, One Election’ has stoked a debate in the country. This concept calls for a single election for state legislatures, Lok Sabha and Panchayats in a span of five years. The effect of such an idea has to be necessarily assessed with its degree of impact on the federal structure of India. It is supposed to bring a major reform in the electoral system and functioning of one of the largest democracies of the world. However, the complex and diverse political nature of our country poses a major challenge for adopting the system of simultaneous elections.

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