

Lok Sabha elections: Why and how to vote?



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Back in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu, the AIADMK, which went it alone, recorded a clean sweep, winning 37 out of 39 constituencies. Similarly, in the 2019 parliamentary elections, the DMK-led alliance romped home to victory, lapping up 38 constituencies. It is worth noting that the two Dravidian majors, which pulled off landslide wins in these two elections, were not part of the front led by the BJP, which formed the government at Centre. Hence, a viewpoint has been doing the rounds on social media that electing the members from these parties to the Lok Sabha, voters have wasted their votes. But in the 2024 parliamentary elections, it is quite manifest that three fronts in the electoral fray are in a position to make a significant impact.

The Lok Sabha is not only run by the ruling party, Prime Minister and Ministers. Opposition and independent members are also indispensable members of Parliament.

How Prime Minister is elected

The results of the Lok Sabha elections will decide who will be the Prime Minister of India for the next five years. But India does not have an election system to elect the President as in countries including the United States.

We do not directly elect the Prime Minister. We elect the Members of Parliament (Lok Sabha). Whichever party or coalition wins the highest number of MPs attains power to form government. Subsequently the winning party's MPs will elect one from among themselves as Prime Minister.

The person who enjoys the support of a majority of members will be the Prime Minister and those nominated by the PM will be sworn in as Ministers by the President. The Central government is helmed by the Cabinet led by the PM. Departments are also allotted for various affairs such as education, health, economy, national security, foreign relations and so on and ministers are appointed for them. They propose new laws, amendments to existing laws and many new schemes pertaining to their respective departments.

A person appointed as a minister in the Central Cabinet must be a Member of the Lok Sabha or of the Rajya Sabha or become a Member of any of the two Houses within six months of being posted as a minister. Major ministerial responsibilities are often entrusted to members of the Lok Sabha.

Role of Opposition

The primary function of Parliament is to present the government Budget, allocate funds to various departments and enact laws. Any law or amendment must be tabled as a Bill in both Houses. All Bills, except Money Bills, become laws only after they are passed with the support of a majority of members of both Houses and with the assent of the President.

When a party or a coalition is ruling at the Centre with a majority, opposition parties cannot prevent the passage of laws in the Lok Sabha. When the ruling party at the Center is in power or a part of the ruling coalition in many states, there is no bar or hindrance to the passage of Bills brought in by the government in the Rajya Sabha as well.

But a Bill becomes a law only after it is debated by members of both Houses of Parliament. All members including Independents can participate in the discussions on Bills. It is only if those affiliated to different principles and ideologies participate in these discussions that the laws proposed by the government can be sanitized of defects as much as possible and can be made more beneficial to the people.

Standing Committees

Sometimes debates on Bills lead to the Bills being referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committees for consideration, which will consist ruling party members as well as opposition members. There is also an opportunity for the government to accept the suggestions made by the opposition members during the discussions and accordingly make some changes in the proposed laws.

Therefore, no matter how strong a ruling party is, members of the opposition can play a vital role in the passage of laws. The opposition members can, at least, put on record their dissent about the Bills even if they cannot spark major changes. It is absolutely essential for democracy.

Also, the Lok Sabha members have the responsibility to explain the needs of the people in their respective constituencies, raise questions to the ministers concerned, voice demands and get what the people need. To execute the responsibility, the MPs must well understand the needs of the constituencies they represent and the wishes of the people. They should also have the power of eloquence to drive home the people's needs during discussions in the Lok Sabha.

Aspects to be considered

Every member elected by the people and sent to the Lok Sabha is important. To know the important aspects for electing the MPs, the duties and powers of the members of the Lok Sabha must be known. Our Constitution has divided all departments into three categories: Union List, State List and Concurrent List. Parliament can enact laws pertaining to the departments falling under the Union and Concurrent Lists. Members of the Lok Sabha can work, only subjects pertaining to these departments. But a significant number of voters exercise their franchise in the Lok Sabha elections, based on the issues that fall under the purview of local bodies such as rainwater logging on roads, blocked drains and so on. They also vote, taking into account the performance of the state government.

The Lok Sabha members' work can impact the people of the country as a whole. So, the voters have to think over what principles a candidate or the party he/she belongs to has on many important issues such as education, health, economy, equal importance to all languages, states' rights, privatization, religion, caste, reservation, foreign affairs etc.

If the candidate is already an MP, the voters can make their choices by analyzing his/her parliamentary performance. How the MP has spent the constituency fund allocated to MPs, how many days he/she has attended the proceedings in the House, how many debates they have participated in, and how many questions they have asked... all these will constitute the yardstick by which the voters can gauge an MP's performance by comparing it with the national average.

It is, of course, important to look at the qualifications, performance and skills of the candidates. But in a parliamentary system, members of the Lok Sabha cannot function on their own. They will lose office if they vote or refuse to vote on laws affecting the country, flouting the orders from the Whips of the parties they belong to. So, it is

important for the voters to know the policies and principles of the parties they prefer and vote accordingly.

The vote each one of us casts in the Lok Sabha elections can, somehow or other, impact the entire country and every individual in the country as well. Imbued with this understanding, let's get ready to exercise our democratic right, that is, to vote, on April 19!

Translated by V. Mariappan.