

Is Simultaneously Polls to Vitate Decentralised Democracy? Or,

**Instead of back sliding democracy with simultaneous elections,
poll reforms for sure will deepen democracy of the country.**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi should be complimented for strategic way he pursues contentious ideas even out of context with futuristic consequences. Even if it meant the country getting labelled as backsliding of democracy. The idea of simultaneous polls for assembly and parliament which he broached more than five years ago has been pursued gearing up the concerned agencies to the tune pegging with a high level committee roping in a former president of the Republic.

Despite the union cabinet had approved the recommendations of that committee to push forward in the parliament with breakneck speed, it is not clear what exactly the scope of the simultaneous elections and its advantages to the people of the country would be. Of course, initially the Prime Minister had advocated the idea on two grounds. One was that frequent elections are costing enormously and second, that the development initiatives are getting crippled as ministers devote considerable time for elections. I do not know on what basis the prime minister had posted on X) last week that simultaneous election proposal "is an important step towards making our democracy even more vibrant and participative." Where as on ground the simultaneous elections meant from any angle just the contrary to what is being claimed or advocated.

What intrigues me is that when simultaneous proposal was made in 2000, I wrote that the PM could accomplish both claims made then one too much expenditure on account of elections and second the development getting interrupted, could be corrected and addressed by the Government forthwith without waiting for any constitutional amendments. I would like to reiterate today even at this point of time all that the PM had claimed in his posting in X last week and even the imaginary benefit that the high level committee had proposed which the cabinet had approved, could be accomplished by the PM and the ruling party right away unless the intentions are altogether different like going for an alternative to

presidential form of Government in a round about way. If that is so it could as well do so upfront and logically. PM Modi today is not only more popular he is even more capable to do smoothly.

The proposal before the Parliament otherwise is misleading because it is neither assures simultaneous nor guarantees "same time" polls nor it ensures or assures free, fair or transparent elections any more or better. Yet why fifteen amendments in the constitution were suggested and are being taken up. If that was serious intention, last couple of Lok Sabha elections could not have been held in 7 or 8 phases stretched over 30-40 days with hardly any difference in voter turnout or better representation of people of the constituencies. On the contrary the election expenditure had doubled from one election to the next. And most Ministers were at large to manage elections irrespective of their local connection or relevance. Where as in 2024 Indonesia, a country of islands and different languages, had conducted its national elections in one day. Which India is capable of doing so even better. We have not even attempted.

Also, if the interest is serious of what is being claimed as the purpose of simultaneous polls, the first requirement is poll reforms that is the way the elections are conducted, the way the candidates come forward, the way they reach out and campaign, bring political parties to a regulatory and accountable measures, etc. Going for constitutional amendments for simultaneous poll for the country even with in hundred days would only amounts more of the same and going for a centralised India.

As if to justify the proposed constitutional amendments next couple of days, the ruling party conducted two-day discussion on constitution in the Parliament ending with two-hour long speech of PM recalling the number of amendments made in the last seventy years. All this to get over this move for simultaneous elections with series of constitutional amendments in a coma flagged move and expecting exposure of the intentions of the simultaneous polls the party in power is polarising and even paralysing Parliament deliberations with irrelevant topics and references as if to avoid any discussion on core issues involved in the simultaneous election move.

The idea of debate on 75th year of the constitution is to shout on roof that it upholds constitution when the reality so far is otherwise as, exactly the opposite. It was a side tracking move in the House with long Election time like campaign speech. The tactics of accusing the opposition leaders with conspiracy against the country exposes the hollowness of the very proposal in context.

The very idea of clubbing panchayat elections as a part of simultaneous idea is nothing but like annexing villages or submerging grassroots. And that elections there hundred days later the elections to Assembly and Parliament is nothing but prompting bandwagoning or bulldozing municipalities, village and Zilla parishad panchayats despite their identity was ensured over fifty years with special constitutional provision and Acts affirming commitment to decentralised democracy and governance. But since the High level committee of Kovid has now suggested to go for simultaneous polls with "bipartisan support" why are we now hurrying to further polarise political parties, inundate the parliament and divide the nation while preaching just the opposite!

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(Wrote four articles in the last three years countering simultaneous polls based on the estimate of poll expenditure each time in the last six general and some state elections.)