

EVM: A BOON OR A BANE ?

ARKAPRAVA BHATTACHARYA

Former Chief Election Commissioner SY Quaraishi had said that people who question the Electronic Voting Machines are the ones who peddle conspiracies to sow seeds of doubt in order to undermine democracy

Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) are 'wonder machines' in the Indian democracy. The purpose of an election is to hear the will of the people, not to fabricate votes. Free and fair elections play a critical role in political transitions by advancing democratization and encouraging political liberalization, helping to promote peaceful, political transformation that lead to increased stability and prosperity. There is always a debate around the issue as to which one is a better option--ballot or electronic machine? Most countries of the world initially used some form of paper ballot as their primary voting system. Paper ballot systems have a number of advantages as they are relatively easy to mark secretly and track if the right protocols are in place. They generally satisfy requirements for both transparency and secrecy. Paper ballots can, however, run afoul of a number of problems with regards to cost, integrity and accessibility.

In the assembly elections held in five states in December 2013, voters stated their

preference of using the electronic method to the Election Commission of India over any other alternatives due to various reasons. For some nations, automated elections mean that people can trust the results because it allows for a process that is auditable, transparent and secure.

Former Chief Election Commissioner SY Quaraishi had mentioned that people who question the Electronic Voting Machines are the ones who peddle conspiracies to sow seeds of doubt in order to undermine democracy. Electronic voting helps reduce human error. It also makes voting more accessible, making it easier for disabled people to vote independently. The key to our victory is what is known as the voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) or verifiable paper record (VPR). The Supreme Court in 2013 lauded this poll panel's initiative as it removes doubts from the minds of the voters. Our voting machines print a paper receipt every time a vote is itemized electronically. This makes it easy to perform recounts and audits because

here one can compare the electronic count with the paper count. It has become the de facto standard worldwide for transparent electronic voting. "The buzzer indicates that the person has voted and then the choice of the voter is registered and saved in the controlling unit," said KJ Rao, general secretary at the Foundation for Advanced Management of Election (FAME), a non-government organization founded by former chief election commissioners. The EVM is also a way to register political right to choose "none of the above," or NOTA, as an option.

The Supreme Court ruled in September 2013 and stated that "Democracy is all about choice. This choice can be better expressed by giving the voters an opportunity to verbalize themselves unreservedly and by imposing least restrictions on their ability to make such a choice." There is a difference between a malfunctioning machine and rigging of elections. These two issues are being used interchangeably and casually. This is fatal to the legitimacy of democracy. It is self sabotage of sorts. The solution is keeping enough reserves of machines and counting more than one machine per constituency to remove doubts in the minds of people. Thus the method of casting free and fair votes is in favour of the electronic method indeed.

The author is a student, BA (LLB), Semester-II, Indian Institute of Legal Studies, Siliguri

