

A VOTER'S POWER IN A DEMOCRACY

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A total of 1.25 billion people of the world's largest democracy will be casting their votes in hopes of a better future for themselves and a more peaceful and prosperous India. The 'right to vote' is one of the most powerful weapons of our democratic set up, guaranteed and protected by the Constitution. Under the principles and mechanisms of the Universal Adult Franchise, every Indian citizen above 18 years of age is empowered to cast their vote, irrespective of their religion, race, caste, gender, descent, and place of birth.

According to Article 21(1) of the Universal Declaration of the human rights, "Everyone has right to take part in the Government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representative."

Further, Article 25 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) says, "Every Citizen shall have the right and opportunity without any distinction mentioned in Article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions-to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives."

Article 326 of the Indian Constitution says that "Elections to the House of People and the legislative Assemblies of states is to be held on the basis of adult suffrage." The Election Commission of India (ECI) is accountable and responsible to conduct free and fair elections. The body is constitutionally mandated to take



care of everything related to the elections, including superintendence, control, and direction of the elections. Despite the vigilant Election Commission and Judiciary, voters from the downtrodden community, who are economically and socially backward, are reduced to mere pawns to political parties who exploit the former's voting rights adopting unfair and unethical means. Even after 70 years of independence, democratic awareness of the people from the grassroots level is poignant. A majority of Indians fails to understand the power of their voting rights.

Elections are of paramount significance for the survival of a democratic state. Through this mechanism, citizens get the chance to choose and decide on the governing author-

ities or the representatives on whom they can bestow their trust on.

Although the dynamic Indian democracy, with exemplary representatives from the different segments of society, has mesmerized the people around the globe, the underprivileged still continue to be manipulated by the political parties. After a study, two professors of Harvard University, Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, have catalogued a checklist of symptoms of a dying democracy in their book entitled "How Democracies Die". They argue that the 'non recognizance' of the voter's rights and aspirations is one of the 'signs' of a dying democracy.

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Indians who have a bigger share of the responsibility in the progress of the nation. Their involvement will bear a profound impact on the society in terms of unprecedented technological transformation. Our voting right gives us the best and most powerful opportunity to participate in the government formation process. It is better to choose our representatives carefully, by judging their caliber and potential, than complain and regret later about their unsatisfactory performance and failure to fulfill the aspirations of the citizens.

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