Lok Sabha Election 2019
A monumental feat & record participation

- AT A GLANCE
- COVER STORY
- REFLECTIONS FROM MEDIA
- DEMOCRACY ON WHEELS
- FROM THE FIELD
- EXPERIENCES
- WE GOT INKED
ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

expresses GRATITUDE to

+ India's 61.30 crore voters
+ 29.24 crore Women Voters
+ 61.46 lakh Persons with Disability Voters
+ 18.05 lakh Service voters
+ All Senior Citizens & Centenarians
+ Booth Level Officers & Volunteers at Polling stations
+ >12 million Officials of Election Machinery
+ CEOs/DEOs/ ROs/SPs and their teams
+ All concerned senior officers of Govt. of India & State/UT Governments
+ Political Parties & Candidates
+ Officials of Election Commission
+ Special Election Observers
+ Observers- General, Police, Expenditure & Accessibility
+ Security forces - CAPF, Police and others
+ Flying Squads & Surveillance teams
+ Technical Expert Committee on EVM & VVPAT, BEL & ECIL
+ Indian Railways & Department of Posts
+ Print, Electronic & Social Media
+ Electoral Literacy clubs, Chunav Pathshalas & Voter Awareness Forums
+ All other Stakeholders working with Election Commission

Those who actually voted

for making our National Elections

Free, Fair, Transparent, Inclusive, Accessible, Ethical & Participative
It gives me pleasure to share with you, our moment of immense pride when Shri Ashok Lavasa, Shri Sushil Chandra and I had the honour of collectively presenting the list of newly elected Members of the 17th Lok Sabha to the Hon’ble President of India on May 25, 2019. The constitutional obligation of the Commission stood fulfilled and recorded in the chronicles of our Republic as yet another milestone in consolidation of democratic polity of the country. It is a source of immense satisfaction that the General Election, 2019 has been delivered to the Nation in a free, fair, peaceful, inclusive, accessible, participative and ethical manner.

In terms of scale and complexity, the Indian Election is a massive management exercise. It involves comprehensive and meticulous planning down to the level of each and every polling station. While we all worked round the clock for managing the electoral operations from the ECI; the entire election machinery of almost 11 million in the field across the country worked in tandem with us, beating the challenges of geo-climatic adversities with a deep commitment to the constitutional mandate of ensuring a credible election.
At this juncture, ECI thanks the Voters of our country especially the women, Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and senior citizens whose presence at the polling station really made each vote count. We also thank all the stakeholders, the entire election machinery including security personnel who worked with tremendous amount of dedication and devotion to duty and made General Election 2019 a grand success.

I am delighted to present to you the third issue of My Vote Matters. It is indeed heartening to see the contributions to the Magazine from across the country and from our colleagues at the ECI as they bring to you the real life experiences of the elections. The narration and the pictures are very informative, educative and inspiring.

I compliment Shri Umesh Sinha, Secretary General, ECI and the Editor-in-Chief of the Magazine and his entire team for the magnificent work done in bringing out this issue.

General Elections, 2019 stand completed but the ‘Desh Ka Maha Tyohar’- the ‘Festival of Democracy’ continues and it must continue for all times to come!

Sunil Arora
Chief Election Commissioner of India

LOK SABHA ELECTION 2019

FAIR
FREE
TRANSPARENT
INCLUSIVE
ACCESSIBLE
ETHICAL
PARTICIPATIVE
Dear Reader,

I feel delighted to place Issue No.3 of ‘My Vote Matters’ into your hands. Both the previous issues had stories of achieving goals and setting milestones. The present issue majorly describes initiatives and preparations for the General Elections, 2019.

Between the covers, one will find inside stories of what it took to organize the world’s largest elections. The insights from officers of the Election Commission; experiences of polling officers in the field; the SVEEP activities to make the elections inclusive and participatory; and engaging with the social media platforms constitute the core of this issue. A new column ‘Journey of Indian Elections since Independence’ is also introduced in this issue.

Given the expance of India and complexity of her terrain, a lot of effort needs to be invested into the electoral machinery. EVMs and VVPATs, the core machines of the electoral process, require to be carried to the last habitation in remote hills, far off islands, forbidding jungles and extremism affected areas. It is a challenge not merely to our strength or courage, but at times to our imagination. This issue bring some true stories by elections heroes, like ones who climbed mountains that took nine hours to ascend and six to descend; or took the EVMs to remote and sparsely populated areas in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram or Himachal Pradesh that voters might exercise their right to franchise.

Turnout Indicator’ from West Bengal, ‘WoWing, the Voters’ from Gujarat, ‘Enhanced Participation’ from Puducherry, ‘For Complete Voter Facilities and Services’ Digital App from Telangana, ‘Little steps go a long way’ from Hardoi (Uttar Pradesh) and ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’ from Delhi promise to be enjoyable reads.

As you go through the stories, you will surely realize that the dedication and determination of an election officer is in no way lesser than that of a soldier who defends our motherland. The election officers brave many hazards; suffer privations; endanger their personal safety to ensure that electoral democracy is implemented on ground level. Last but not the least; it is our voters, who need to be applauded as heroes. It is they who queue up in the booths, at times traversing good amount of distance, braving sun, rain, holiday lethargy and extremists’ bullets.

I am grateful to Shri Sunil Arora, Hon’ble Chief Election Commissioner for his continuous guidance for shaping up the magazine and enhancing its quality despite his busy schedule. I am also thankful to Shri Ashok Lavasa and Shri Sushil Chandra, Hon’ble Election Commissioners for their encouragement and support to bring out this issue.

My hearty thanks to all contributors, who took off their valuable time, to write for their stories here. The documentary value of these stories will be their real compensation. I also thank the editorial team for putting the issue together astutely. Their efforts and dedication will surely ensure that ‘My Vote Matters’ grows from strength to strength.

The General Election, 2019 was a mega event, whose stories are unlikely to be exhausted by what is being narrated here. The subsequent issues are likely to have some more stories from the ground zero.

I dedicate this issue of ‘My Vote Matters’ to the cause of good elections in our great democracy.

Umesh Sinha
Secretary General, ECI
ON THE COVER

Chief Election Commissioner, Sunil Arora along with Election Commissioners Ashok Lavasa and Sushil Chandra called upon the President of India on May 25, 2019 to present the names of elected members to the 17th Lok Sabha.

08-11
GENERAL ELECTIONS 2019 AT A GLANCE

12-47
COVER STORY

New Initiatives, Innovations for Enhancing Voter Participation

FACTS & FACTOIDOS OF LOK SABHA ELECTION 2019

20-21
cVigil - Vigilant Citizen App
22-24
Media Engagement and Regulation
26-28

AB WATAN DABAYEGA BUTTON 29

SOCIAL MEDIA

30-31
Doorstep Facility through PwD App
32-33
SVEEP Innovations and Outreach in 2019 34-47

48-53
WIDE ANGLE

Electoral Reforms in India 48-49
Ensuring Ethical Elections 50-51
Engaging through Community Radio 52-53

54-57
REFLECTIONS FROM MEDIA

58-64
ELECTION SERIES
GENERAL ELECTIONS 2019

At a Glance

VOTER TURNOUT PERCENTAGE
LOK SABHA ELECTION 2019

2019 - 67.47*
2014 - 66.44

* Data as on 30.05.2019
A Glance at Lok Sabha Election 2019*

- Electors: 908.7 Million
- Postal Ballots Cast: 2.28 Million
- Polling Stations: 542
- Parliamentary Constituencies: 543
- Highest Voter Turnout Ever: 66.79%
- Highest Women Voter Turnout Ever: 67.47%
- Voters Voted: 613 Million
- Polling Officials: 12 Million

*India has 543 Constituencies in total. Election in one Parliamentary Constituency was postponed.

Women Elected in Lok Sabha Election Over the Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Election</th>
<th>Elected Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-85</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTESTING CANDIDATES OVER THE YEARS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR OF ELECTION</th>
<th>Number of Contestants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>2369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>2439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>5492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>8749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>4750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>5435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-85</td>
<td>8251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>13952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>4648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>8070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>8026*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>7,74,651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>6,87,473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>7,72,681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>10,38,096</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Excludes data of Vellore PC

NUMBER OF POLLING STATIONS IN LOK SABHA ELECTIONS (1951-2019)
New Initiatives, Innovations for Enhancing Voter Participation during General Election 2019 to 17th Lok Sabha

Umesh Sinha
Secretary General, ECI

General Elections 2019 in India, world’s largest democracy were set into motion with announcement of the elections on March 10, 2019 and concluded on schedule on May 27, 2019 with declaration of results to the 17th Lok Sabha (House of the People) in last week of May 2019. The election that involved about 91 cr. electorate spread over 10.36 lakh polling stations across the country, was delivered to the nation in seven phases from March 19 to May 19, 2019 with a voter turnout of 67.47%, the highest ever turnout for the Lok Sabha election in India.

Termed as ‘Desh ka Maha Tyohar’ (Mega Festival of Indian Democracy) the election goes into the history as the largest electoral exercise among democracies of the world.

Lok Sabha Election 2019 was characterized by the quantum jump in electoral participation as compared to Lok Sabha election in 2014. It was heartening to witness registration of 7.6 cr. additional electors and addition of 1 Lakh new polling stations. A record number of 61.3 cr. voters cast their vote in 2019 elections whereas about 55 cr. voters had cast their vote in 2014 elections. Voter turnout in 2019 became 67.44 % as compared to 66.5 % in 2014.

Drawing support from the constitutional mandate and legislative framework, ECI, works on the premise of ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’: a perfect intent for inclusive and accessible elections. The ECI’s commitment to free,
fair and credible elections with integral features such as universal suffrage, inclusive, accessible, informed and ethical participation has driven innovation and new initiatives right from inception.

The main focus of the Election Commission of India was to provide efficient and speedy electoral services to voters for enhanced, informed and ethical participation. Efforts in this direction included a series of well planned and targeted interventions for inclusion of all categories of voters through a series of initiatives under Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP), innovation and integration of state-of-the-art technology in election process and operating procedures aimed at enhanced fulfillment of cherished goal as per ECI’s premise ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’ in line with the constitutional mandate. Some of the key initiatives, technological innovations developed, adopted and operated by us at the ECI during GE 2019 are as follows:

1. Electoral Roll Management:

Ensuring a healthy Electoral Roll is the very bedrock of Election Process. Commission’s ERONET brings in seamless processing of forms, structured easy handling of the databases, regular and simpler way of monitoring the ERs activities to maintain the ERs in good health. The system is IT driven and has three major components:

**Unified National Photo Electoral Roll (UNPER)**

It is a combination of demographical information, personal particulars and a photograph of Elector for the entire country and includes a mechanism to remove multiple entries by braining it to the knowledge of appropriate authority.

**National Voters’ Service Portal (NVSP)**

ECI launched IT driven powerful National Voters’ Service Portal (NVSP) on January 25, 2015 as a single window service to electors at [http://www.nvsp.in](http://www.nvsp.in). Entire electoral roll data of the country for about 91 cr. voters along with all the polling stations has been brought under this umbrella portal to extend efficient user friendly services to citizens. Users have been empowered under the NVSP for the following services:

- Search the name in Electoral List
- Apply online in English/Hindi Language for new registration
- Apply online for corrections, if any
- View details of Polling booth, Assembly Constituency and Parliamentary Constituency
- Get the contact details of Booth Level Officer, Electoral Registration Officer and other Election Officials
- Link to CEO offices websites
- View audio visual short films to get educated about election processes. Audio Visual scripts are also available for getting to know about the polling processes.

**Photo Electoral Rolls and Elector Photo Identity Cards (EPICs)**

The country had gone to polls with Photo Electoral Rolls for the first time in 2009. By now, all the States and UTs have Photo Electoral Rolls (PERs). Around 99.72% electors photographs of have been included in the rolls. With the intention of preventing impersonation at polls, the Commission provided Electoral Photo Identity Cards (EPICs) to all electors. EPIC contains particulars of the elector like name, father’s/mother’s/husband’s name, date of birth/age on the qualifying date, sex, address and most importantly, the photograph of the elector. EPIC serves as a valid Identity card cum address proof and valid identity to vote in elections as well.

**Photo Voter Slips**

Official voter slips bearing the Photograph of the elector were distributed to all voters sufficiently in advance of the date of poll. A close monitoring of the distribution process was done by concerned DEO and General Observer. Voter slips are prepared in the respective electoral roll is published for an Assembly Constituency.
The Commission has laid special emphasis on systematic, efficient and timely distribution of the Photo Voter Slips through Booth Level Officers. A well designed system of distribution and monitoring thereof has also been brought in place to obviate any misuse.

**Online Service voter registration and ETPBS**

Online voter registration facility was provided for enhancing voter registration especially from service voters. Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) was used for transmitting postal ballot electronically for service voters to facilitate their participation.

**2. Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP)**

SVEEP, the flagship voter education programme of ECI, that was started as an exercise for information, motivation and facilitation campaign in 2009, has evolved into is a multi-media mega programme that reaches out to 91 cr. voters of the country. SVEEP ensures targeted interventions for enhancing ‘Inclusion’ in voter registration and participation among all sections of society in pursuit of ECI’s premise of ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’. Focus areas include voter awareness, motivation, facilitation; voter apathy and electoral literacy for enhancing participation of women, PwDs, senior citizens, new and future voters, besides persons on duty etc.

**Innovative Initiatives for Future and New Voters**

**Interactive School Engagement (ISE) Programme**

The Interactive School Engagement (ISE) programme was developed and launched to target the future voters in schools to sensitize them about the electoral process in general and about the registration and voting procedure in particular. It was carried out as a part of run-up to the National Voters’ Day (NVD) 2017 which had the theme ‘Empowering Young and Future Voters’. Total of more than 5.7 million students in 28 thousand schools were covered.

**Electoral Literacy Clubs**

Mainstreaming of Electoral Literacy through curricular and extracurricular interventions in schools and colleges has been an important agenda under Strategic Action Plan for enhancing participation among new voters and preparing the future voters. ELC project was launched on the eve of NVD 2018 and envisages setting up of ELCs in all schools as per following categories:

- ELC Future Voters: Classes IX to XII
- ELC New Voters: College, University and all other Educational Institutions.
- Chunav Pathshala: ELC in Communities for youth not covered under formal education system
Resources have been developed and made available to all CEOs for translation (in vernacular wherever required) and making available to Trainers/ Educational Institutions etc. Entire Programme is strictly nonpartisan and neutral in nature. A total of 488,000 ELCs including 44194 VAFs have been already opened. The programme is being closely monitored for further strengthening.

**Voter Awareness Forums**

Voter Awareness Forums have been launched for voter education in organizations, institutions, Government offices for creating electoral awareness among employees. etc. Resources have been developed for all these programmes, training, capacity building and monitoring are important areas for enhancing the outcomes.

**Initiatives in Enhancing Gender Participation**

Gender equality is one of the important areas of attention in the electoral participation. Voter education programmes have focused at removal of gender gap in electoral participation. Based on Knowledge, Attitude and Practices survey targeted interventions are designed with a roadmap for intervention down to the polling station level. Women specific campaigns for registration, cultural interventions, BLO’s sensitization, women self help groups including government programmes infrastructure are involved for encouraging, motivating and facilitating women in enrollment and participation. Women specific cultural events, women icons at all levels as strategies are also included. Facilitation for women at polling stations has been enhanced to include inter alia separate queues for women and ‘All Women Polling Stations’.

**Inclusion of PwDs for Accessible Elections**

Accessible Elections was selected by the Commission as the NVD theme for 2018. The activities started with an International Conference on ‘Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Electoral Processes’ on January 24, 2018. National Consultation for Accessible Elections was organized with the stakeholders right from the District level to the State level culminating into the National
level consultation. Strategic Framework for Accessible Elections was presented and immediate facilitation measures such as Braille Printed EPICs, Disability data base in electoral rolls and linkage to transport facility and special facilitation for PwDs on polling day etc. were declared. 62 lakh PwD electors were identified and suitable facilitation provided for their participation in the form of their transport and comfortable access to the polling stations in General Elections 2019.

3. National Multi-Media Campaign

National Multi-Media campaign had been launched during the General Elections 2019 as an additional measure to strengthen the impact of SVEEP. The Campaign was operated through national electronic media, both the TV and Radio, social and digital media, major newspapers, cinema halls, outdoor media at airports and major railway stations besides a robust partnership with Metro Rail. The campaign focused on essential topics such as registration, voter verification, voter helpline, informed and ethical voting, inclusion, gender, service voters, overseas electors besides motivational messages.

4. Community Radio Program

The ECI tried expanding its outreach by leveraging NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling) Community Radio through a series named ‘Mat Evam Matdan, Karen Lekhantr Ka Nirman’ from June to November 2017. This series on elections was a joint initiative of ECI and NIOS-CR where different aspects of elections and the election processes would be explored. Each of the one-hour episodes was aired monthly and incorporated interviews/ panel discussion with expert(s) along with small snippets of different creatives developed by the ECI to spread awareness on importance of elections such as songs, jingles, audio/video plays, statements by icons, advertisements etc.

5. Assured Minimum Facilities at Polling Stations (AMF)

Every polling station was equipped with Assured Minimum Facilities (AMF) such as drinking water, shade, toilet, and ramp for PwDs, medical kit, adequate lighting, proper signage and a standard voting compartment etc. Facilitation centers were set up for voters near polling stations. Special Facilities were provided for PwDs, senior citizens and women to enhance their participation. It was ECI’s endeavor to make voting a memorable experience for every voter.

6. EVM and VVPAT Machines and Awareness Programmes

In all, 2.3 million Ballot Units, 1.6 million Control Units and 1.7 million VVPAT machines were deployed during 2019 GE. Deployment of the machines is done under multilevel randomization through sophisticated software. Security protocols are scrupulously followed and closely monitored at all levels. A comprehensive voter education and awareness programme on use of EVM with VVPAT in all States/UTs was launched for enhancing elector confidence. Mobile vans were deployed to cover each and every village/hamlet to demonstrate and conduct mock polls using EVMs and VVPATs by the voters themselves.
7. Empowering Citizens and Stakeholders through use of Information and Communication Technology:

The ECI developed and operated a number of IT/ICT driven services to enhance the speed and quality of electoral processes by using cloud technology, innovative user friendly interfaces and strong data bases. ECI operates numerous dynamic portals for various stakeholders- EROs, ECI officers, election observers, EVM managers, Presiding Officers, media and the people of this country.

‘Service to Voters only One Call Away’

The Commission established a universal toll free Helpline number 1950 for the country for providing information related to elections, voting dates, EPIC, electoral roll, online registration or lodge a complaint. Voter education and voter awareness was also disseminated through this number. Voter Helpline App and PwD App (for Persons with Disabilities) were launched to provide comprehensive voter services through mobile phones.

cVIGIL: By using the cVIGIL app, citizens can record on Android mobile and promptly report violation of Model Code of Conduct, incidents of intimidation or inducement in real time. All that one has to do is to simply click a picture or make a video and briefly describe the activity and upload it on the cVIGIL mobile app. The cVIGIL provides time-stamped evidentiary proof of violation. The District Control Room allocates cVIGIL cases to the Flying Squads etc. through GIS-based platform. Flying Squads investigate the matter and the Returning Officer takes the decision. The status of complaint is shared with the complainant on App within 100 minutes.

Voter Helpline Mobile app provides convenience to all Citizens of finding names in the electoral roll, submitting online forms, checking the status of the application, filing complaints and receiving the reply on their mobile app. All forms, results, candidate affidavit, press notes, Voter awareness and important instructions are available through the mobile app. This popular app is available at Google Play Store.

PwD App: Eligible citizens/ citizens in the category of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) can request for new registration, change in address, change in particulars and mark themselves as PwD through the use of the mobile application. By simply entering their contact details,
a Booth Level Officer is assigned to provide doorstep facility to them. PwDs can also request for a wheelchair during polling. The app is available on Google Play Store.

Suvidha Candidate App: Contesting candidates can log on to the website https://suvidha.eci.gov.in and request for permissions. Upon successful registration, an Android based Mobile app is available for tracking the status of nomination, status of their permission requests. The candidates will be able to download the application from Google Play Store and with their registered mobile number will be able to log on and keep track of their applications.

Samadhan: ECI has designed an integrated web portal for registering and resolving citizen Information, Suggestion, Feedback and Complaints (IFSC). The website can be accessed at https://eci-citizenservices.eci.nic.in/. The universal portal is available for election as well as non-election period, and any citizen can also use the facility from the convenience of their mobile phone to lodge a grievance using ‘Voter Helpline’ Mobile App.

Suggestions and Complaints. Any user can call 1950 and obtain information about his Voter details in the electoral roll, check for the status of his enrollment application and also lodge grievance.

8. IT Apps For Election Officials:

Observer App: Observer mobile app aids Observers in the real-time to get all information about the Parliamentary/Assembly Constituency and send observation reports to ECI instantly and securely. All cVIGIL cases reported in their jurisdiction are available to General Observers, Expenditure and Police Observers and they can supervise and give their inputs too from the place of citing of the cVIGIL incidence.

Suvidha: The application provides a robust single interface for candidates and political parties to apply and get permission for all campaign related activities in time bound manner and for ROs, DEOs, and CEOs for effective management and monitoring of Candidate Nomination, Candidate Affidavit filing, candidate/political parties permissions management, Counting, and results display. New Suvidha also has complete decision support system for Returning Officers which includes, Electoral Roll, Observers deployment plan, Polling Station details, Voter Slip distribution statistics and an interface to handle all complaints.
Sugam: The Election Commission of India has been using this application for Vehicle Management with the facility of issuance of requisition letters for vehicles, Capturing of vehicle details with address, mobile number and bank details of owner & driver, transfer of vehicles from one district to another district etc. It is to be used by CEOs as per requirements.

EVM Management System (EMS): One of the important modes to ensure a fair and transparent process in EVM management is the administrative protocol of randomization of the machines before they are deployed in the Polling stations. This whole process is done in the presence of Political Parties’/Candidates representatives. The New EVM Management System will be used for randomization in addition to end to end inventory management. Election Monitoring Dashboard: The online system for reporting the poll turnout in the PCs and ACs and incidents at the polling booth level. This will bring a single source of truth across the full managerial network across the Election Commission of India. The data is entered by the Returning Officer.

9. One-way Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot for Service Voters:

All registered Service Voters are delivered e-postal ballot of their respective constituency through Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS), which will be printed and after casting the vote will be sent back to Returning Officer by post.

Highlights: General Election 2019 to 17th Lok Sabha

The ECI’s initiatives and innovation have provided rich dividend in terms of a quantum jump in electoral participation in the country from all categories of voters in General Elections 2019. Let me share some of the areas of achievement as follows:

• At 67.47% voter turnout, General Election 2019 for 17th Lok Sabha witnessed the highest voter participation in the history of India. It eclipsed the previous turnout records of 66.44 % in 2014 and 58.19% in 2009.

• 61.3 cr Voters cast their vote in GE 2019, an increase of 5.9 cr voters over GE 2014.

• The size of national electorate has grown to about 91 cr. in 2019 from 83.4 cr. in 2014. This is an addition of over 7.46 cr. electors, of these 4.07 cr. are women and 3.3 cr are men.

• Targeted SVEEP interventions over these years have resulted in tremendous increase in female voter turnout as well. Women turnout stands at 66.79% as against 65.5% in 2014.

• Gender gap in GE 2019 has been reduced to just 0.1 % (Male Turnout at 66.89%) from 1.46 % in 2014.

• 18 States/UT recorded higher women turnout percentage than men.

• 62 Lakh Persons with Disabilities (PwD) electors were identified and suitable arrangements made for their transport and comfortable access inside polling station.

• Total postal ballots cast in 2019 are unprecedented 23 Lakh.

Initiatives, innovations and integration of technology for enhancing electoral participation is a continuous process and we at the ECI are working incessantly at it with our commitment to the mandate for ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’. Our efforts will continue for enhancing electoral participation to further strengthen and consolidate democracy through free, fair, transparent, inclusive and credible elections.
16 States/UTs recorded a higher women voter turnout percentage than men.

There were 18.05 lakh service voters registered for General Elections 2019 which is the highest ever service voters’ registration.

In its first ever Lok Sabha election, Telangana has witnessed 62.78% voter turnout.

Nagaland achieved the highest voter turnout among all states with 83.43% in Lok Sabha 2019 while Lakshadweep recorded the highest voter turnout among all States/UTs at 85.38%.

Overseas electors number increased to 1,15,701 during Parliament Elections 2019 as compared to 851 during during Parliament Elections 2014.

Madhya Pradesh achieved the highest increase as compared to LS 2014 in voter turnout at 9.65% followed by Himachal Pradesh at 8.73% and Andhra Pradesh at 5.67%.
Maximum Margin: C.R Patil, Navsari, Maharashtra got 9,72,739 and won over Patel Dharmeshbhai Bhimbhai who secured 2,83,071 votes with a margin of 6,89,668 votes.

A total of 61,46,333 PwD voters were identified and facilitated through the PwD Mobile App during General Elections 2019.

Minimum Margin:
Bholanath (B.P. Saroj) of BJP Machhlishahr, UP got 4,88,397 beating Tribhuvan Ram of BSP who secured 4,88,216 votes with a margin of 181 votes.

Nizamabad, Telangana had the maximum number of contesting candidates at 185 while Tura, Meghalaya had only 3 candidates.

Shankar Lalwani from Indore won with maximum number of votes - 10,68,569 while Mohammed Faizal PP from Lakshadweep was a winning candidate with the minimum number of votes - 22,851.

78 Female MPs have been elected in this election.
cVIGIL - Vigilant Citizen App

Building confidence and trust of stakeholders by active involvement

Dr. Sandeep Saxena,
Senior Deputy Election Commissioner, ECI

cVIGIL App, a short name for ‘Vigilant Citizens’ is an Android mobile application designed and developed by the Election Commission of India (ECI) based on the experience of the successful pilot implemented in RK Nagar AC Bye-Elections in Tamil Nadu held during June 2015 by name eNetra (election-Novel Electronic Tracking and Surveillance) Application, which empowered citizens to report various election related violations. Essential features of eNetra such as response time of 60 minute, GPS tracked Flying Squads, Alerts and Notifications to citizens as well as authorities and notification of outcome to citizens etc., were developed further based on the learnings of eNetra pilot as cVIGIL which was successfully implemented in the five states’ Assembly Elections in November-December 2018. During Parliament Elections 2019, cVIGIL Gold version was rolled out pan India by adding the Observes Module and Monitoring Module.

cVIGIL is very user-friendly app which helps the user to capture legally tenable and prosecutable information of any violation and to send it to enforcement agencies for verification and suitable action. The application is designed to be online so that every actor in the whole process, from the citizen to the administrators viz. Chief Electoral Officers, District Election Officers, Returning Officers, Flying Squads and Police, use the cVIGIL App.
on either mobile platforms or web-based systems ensuring prompt disposal of Model Code of Conduct and Election Expenditure violation cases.

Three factors work simultaneously to make the platform a success:

1) Users capture photos or videos of alleged election related violation in real-time, since uploading from the phone gallery is disabled;

2) All visual or video-graphic evidence are automatically geotagged;

3) A 100-minute countdown for time-bound disposal of complaints.

As a result of nearly 1,42,250 complaints which were received during Parliament election period, 99% of which were disposed of, and 80% were found correct. One can compare this to the enforcement actions taken during previous elections in which citizens were not co-opted in the enforcement of the code, and a meagre of 20-25% of complaints alone were found correct.

cVIGIL helped in achieving bottom-up approach of enforcement of laws related to free and fair conduct of election, timely and effective action against the violators of various laws, following a preventive rather than reactive law enforcement regime by involving the community. The engagement and participation of citizens in the enforcement process enhances the credibility of election process. It promotes mutual trust based relationship between officials and citizens. cVIGIL application facilitates building partnerships by creating awareness, building trust, and confidence. Countless reports and feedback received on cVIGIL suggest that this spurred citizens to rethink their role in the electoral process, stay vigilant, and know about what is permissible as part of a campaign, and what is not. A large proportion of users did not opt to remain anonymous; and revisited cVIGIL indicating their experience of their complaints being acted on. The Commission started a ‘leaderboard’ in the app, to identify and reward the most proactive citizens. In many cases, ordinary voters raised their voice against local strongmen, or influential persons who were flouting the law.


cVIGIL prioritized speedy and effective action by authorities by sending the status report to citizens within 100 minutes. The 100 minute countdown starts, with several in-built checks: the nearest Flying Squad of the Commission had to accept or acknowledge the complaint within 15 minutes; complete a preliminary inquiry in the next 30 minutes; and the Returning Officer decides the case in the next 50 minutes. The 100 minute timelines infused energy into the enforcement staff and a sense of urgency prevailed. Though the time was indicative, almost 60% of the cases i.e. over 85,000 cases were resolved in 100 minutes or less. A robust case allocation and monitoring system allowed the Chief Electoral Officers, Returning Officers and the Commission to investigate delays, incorrect decisions, and recurring instances of lethargy.

The cVIGIL Mobile Technology also empowered the enforcement agencies, especially field units, which included Flying Squads, Static Surveillance Team, Video Surveillance Team etc., in identifying the location of incidence on-the-fly, getting the cVIGIL case along with the photograph or video on the mobile, and the best of all they need not create any paperwork for cVIGIL cases, as they simply had to file the report through the application itself. There were a total of 45,892 field units, which were formed and 78,782 Flying Squads staff. One of the biggest challenges is to
prevent slacking in the system especially when it is so huge to manage.

One of the fundamental shifts cVIGIL brought in its 77% success was the GIS based location tagging since the app automatically enables a geo-tagging feature when users switched on their camera in the cVIGIL to report a violation. This enabled the Flying Squads to know the precise location of a reported violation, and the image could be used as evidence in a court of law. Finally, a delivery-oriented culture was promoted among ECI officials by rewarding speedy and effective action. Officials could see a leaderboard, on which the names of the most effective officers were displayed. This encouraged colleagues to act with greater speed, and take complaints more seriously when their own turn came.

Analysis of the Parliament Election cVIGIL data indicates that out of the total number of 1,42,270 reported cases on this platform; 1,41,618 cases (99%) were meaningfully acted upon, i.e., either they were closed after the action was taken, or forwarded for further investigation, or closed because the report was incorrect. 1,10,029 (80%) of the cases were found to be correct and were acted upon. The maximum cases were filed in the state of Kerala (64,114) followed by Madhya Pradesh (16,472), and West Bengal (13116).

Trust of stakeholders, particularly the citizens in the fair, impartial and neutral conduct of elections is the bedrock of a strong democracy. cVIGIL Gold proved to be a very useful application in building this trust and confidence of stakeholders in the conduct of elections since citizens felt themselves as the partners of ECI authorities in ensuring neutrality, fairness and level playing field in elections.
WHEN I SEE PEOPLE VIOLATING MCC CAN I CAN’T STOP THEM.
THANKS TO cVIGIL MOBILE APP #GoReport

What is cVIGIL?
cVIGIL is a fast-track election-related complaint reception and redressal mobile app which you can use to report incidents of misconduct within minutes of having witnessed them.

You can use cVIGIL app to report
• Violation of Model Code of Conduct
• Unethical practice during the elections including intimidation or inducement
• Incidents of political misconduct
• Expenditure violations during the elections

Voter Helpline 1950
Election Commission of India https://eci.gov.in/
MEDIA ENGAGEMENT AND REGULATION
A fine balance making elections free, fair & democratic

Dhirendra Ojha
Director General, ECI

The recently concluded Lok Sabha election saw an active engagement of mass media. During the three month long election period, every aspect of electioneering was taken by media to every household across the country. More than 900 news channels, 17,573 newspapers and various social media micro blogging sites were communicating every important update to the people in an effective manner.

Effective communication has been the backbone of any healthy society, since ages people have been using various means to interact and communicate with one another proving the importance of communication in a developed society. Mass media has revolutionized the communication scenario completely with message reaching out to the masses and shaping their views - historically impacting a country’s political, economic, social and cultural life.

There is no denying of the fact that media is an extremely essential element in a democracy. Media plays an important role in conducting a free, fair and participative election. During election time, it becomes imperative that the media provides people with all information necessary to make informed choices.

Media Engagement and Facilitation

Election Commission of India considers media as its strongest ally; during the Lok Sabha election 2019 India’s media yet again proved to be a force multiplier in the delivery of free and fair polls. Right from the announcement of the elections till its conclusion media disseminated all vital information to all stakeholders. While providing a platform for debates and deliberations it also played its role of the Commission’s eyes and ears in maintaining the sanctity of Model Code of Conduct and other election related violations.

During these elections, Election Commission proactively engaged with the media to provide them information and clarify their doubts. To facilitate transparency and easy dissemination of information during the elections ECI conducted weekly press conferences and issued regular press notes addressing possible concerns and doubts around elections.

Under ECI’s media facilitation and outreach strategy, daily evening press briefings were
Media Monitoring

Election Commission of India has its own unique set of instruments for monitoring and to some extent regulation of election related content in Media platforms. ECI’s three tier Media Certification & Monitoring Committees (MCMC) is the nodal committee which is involved in three key functions like:

- Pre-certification of Political ads on Electronic Media (including social media)
- Monitoring and action on Paid News cases
- Monitoring all media during elections for the enforcement of MCC and media related regulations as provided in law

MCMC through its uniquely designed set of functions help to maintain a level playing field for a free, fair and democratic election even in the space of media so that electors get to see the balanced picture and do not get swayed by objectionable, misinformed or disinfomed political contents.

MCMCs are set up at District and State levels comprising designated State and Central Government officers in consonance with the specific requirements of the committee. There were specified guidelines for election related contents on Print and Electronic media but this Lok Sabha Election and the simultaneous Assembly Elections also witnessed the crucial step of including a social media expert as a new addition to the MCMC committees specially dedicated to monitor, scrutinize and take action on matters related to
political content on social media platforms. Media Certification & Monitoring Committees (MCMC) are specialized committees with pre-certification of political advertisements as their primary function. The Supreme Court through its order in 2004 made it mandatory that no political advertisement can be published on electronic media without pre-certification from Election Commission and its committees. MCMCs tirelessly pre-certified political advertisements during these elections. For the first time, social media organizations ensured that no political advertisement was published on their platform without pre-certification.

MCMC is also on the task to check the menace of Paid News. In the confirmed cases of Paid News, the cost of the news is added to the election expenditure accounts of the candidates. Additionally, ECI refers these cases to PCI (Press Council of India) and NBSA (News Broadcasting Standards Authority) with respect to the concerned print media and electronic media respectively for necessary action at their end.

Monitoring the Media for better Election Management

Media & journalists are the eyes and ears of Election Commission during election time. ECI has a dedicated mechanism for monitoring election activities as reported on major national and regional electronic media channels during election, Electronic Media Monitoring Committee (EMMC). EMMC comprising of permanent and temporarily hired staff for election period is a robust yet systematic mechanism at Districts, State and ECI level. On the pre-poll day (from morning 8am to evening 8pm) and poll day (from 6am to closing of poll) on the basis of reported cases on major regional and national news channels, cases were escalated, redressed and in case of incorrect news immediate rebuttals were issued as per process, and all this happened every two hours. This robust and continuous mechanism kept the Commission abreast about the situations at the ground level during the poll day and real time redressal of issues which helped in the smooth conduct of election.

Media Regulations

Although the Election Commission does not regulate media; it is the responsibility of Election Commission to enforce the provisions of the law or the Court’s directions which might have linkages with media or certain aspects of media functioning. It was ensured that laws and guidelines on Model Code of Conduct, exit polls, silence period, hate speech, misinformation were not violated in the election. During these elections, ECI kept a strict vigil on maintaining election laws on social media. A voluntary ‘Code of Ethics’ was put in place by social media platforms to ensure expeditious action on cases of violation of election laws. As a successful endeavor, during this period there were 909 posts/pages that were taken down by social media platforms on the basis of reports sent by ECI Nodal Officers during the election.
Youth Ambassador, RJ Malishka released a viral song, ‘Vote Hard’ that resonated with the youth of the country encouraging them to come out and vote!

Story of oldest voter showcasing age is just a number. If you are an 18 Year old you have to vote come what may.

Story of army officer who teaches others that voting is also a way to protect the nation — तू भी सिपाही बन

Story of a blind voter showcasing personal effort of the voter but also highlights the facilities for Persons with Disabilities at the polling booths

Around 15 kms from noida is a village called Dalelpur which falls in Gautam Budh Nagar constituency. The only way to reach this village is a dirt track of three kilometre after crossing a river. The 250 residents of Dalelpur had decided to refrain from voting in the elections. However, Red FM tried to reach the village and to get to the roots of the problem. RJ Raunak took up the task of convincing the villagers and visited the village himself to talk to the residents. The efforts received tremendous support from the listeners and RJ’s from different cities also added their energy to the campaign. After requests coming in from every part of the country and continuous efforts of red fm, villagers of Dalelpur relaised their duty and agreed to be a part of the election. Red FM took care of their transport hassle for the day of election and arranged a bus for the same. Dalelpur has finally seen its ray of hope and the village proudly said - “Ab Watan Dabayega Button.”
SOCIAL MEDIA VIOLATION CASES DURING LOK SABHA 2019

During the 2019 General Election, political campaigning on social media was one of the major challenges in the conduct of free and fair elections. Election Commission of India along with Voluntary Code of Ethics developed by IAMAI and major social media platforms ensured an early detection of violation of election laws on social media and speedy action on them. Following is a table of complaints reported to various social media platforms and actions taken thereafter:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>ShareChat</th>
<th>Google</th>
<th>Whatsapp</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Posts</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during silence period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political ads</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during silence period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violation of Model Code</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code of Conduct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter Misinformation</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Morality and Decency</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit Poll</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hate Speech /</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undue influence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>650</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>909</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

8,049
NUMBER OF CANDIDATES
CONTESTED THIS LOK SABHA
ELECTION 2019, OF WHICH
719
WERE
FEMALE CANDIDATES.

SHIFTING FROM ONE
ASSEMBLY CONSTITUENCY TO ANOTHER?
Fill Form 6 to get your address
updated in electoral roll

TYPES OF EVM
- EVM
- VVPAT
- EVM with VVPAT

EVM CAN NOT BE
CONNECTED WITH OTHER DEVICES

Do You Know?
- In Lok Sabha Election,
5 randomly selected
voters on each assembly segment of
a constituency are selected and polled
with the EVM
- No mismatch

Visit the website: www.eci.gov.in
Rajnath Singh

Election Commission of India

Vote

EVM

#TrustEVM

Press Release: Pollled EVMs are absolutely
safe in Strongrooms.

Our vanguards!
Service Voters played many roles, as
guardians of polling booths, assisting
voters in voting while ensuring that
their vote both & mark their
vote appropriately.

@IECIndia @CRPFIndia @AADRPAC @IndiaCoaS
@MrsPramodKishor @Indiannavy
DOORSTEP FACILITY THROUGH PwD APP

Dr. Kushal Kumar Pathak
Director ICT, ECI

The General Elections to Parliament witnessed unprecedented involvement of Persons with Disabilities. It was primarily driven by Election Commission of India taking a vow of making this election an ‘Accessible Election’. One of the most potent ways by which PwDs were approached, was by the way of technology. It not only empowered PwD voters but facilitated them tremendously all through the election process.

The website of Election Commission of India was made more accessible with features such as Screen Reader Access, Table Headers, and Alternate Text, etc. This made the website content available to Persons with Disabilities in a much friendlier manner. However, the biggest achievement of all had been the introduction of the mobile app for Persons with Disabilities. The intent was to facilitate PwD Voters in verifying their names in the electoral roll, enrolling them, getting their name, address and photograph corrected.

To do this, Mobile accessibility features like voice-over prompts, high contrasting interface, and easy navigation were developed in the app. The user interfaces were kept very simple. All that a PwD user has to do is simply navigate and enter the mobile number and address. This information travels down to Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) in minutes and ERO in-turn allocates the case to Booth Level Officers to visit the home of the PwD user to get the form filled up. During the whole process, the PwD App user has a

1. **Inform About Your Disability:** The App allows the Person with Disabilities to mark themselves as a PwD voter by entering their EPIC number and it will automatically fetch their details. Voice Access and Select to Speak features are also available for the visually impaired person which increases the accessibility of the app.

2. **Request For New Voter ID Registration:** A seamless tool which allows PwDs to register as a new voter with minimal information. While creating this app, we kept the convenience of PwDs in mind. Registration will only require the name and address of the person and the rest work would be done by the Election Commission.

3. **Request For Transfer:** When a voter relocates from one geographical location or one constituency to another, their voting districts or state also changes, which may require lots of struggle and documentation work, but this PwD app will shorten the struggle during transfer which is one of the paramount requirements.

4. **Request For Updation:** Any correction, addition, or deletion in your voter ID card can easily be done, using this amazing feature of the application.

5. **Request For Wheelchair:** The inclusion of PwDs voter is essential, in the election process to offer them the feeling of equality. Providing wheelchair is the first step to give them the equality and dignity to cast a vote.
reference number to track their application status.

Considering the success of the application, many new features were introduced further. One of the new initiatives of the Commission had been to provide wheelchairs, volunteer assistance in the booth, and in some cases pick up from home. To assist this, a pre-emptive database was created with the help of PwD app. Each of the PwD voters was given the choice of identifying their disability type and marking themselves as PwD. This helped the District Official to prepare themselves with the number of PwD voters requiring assistance and what type of assistance they would require.

As the Poll day neared, many PwD supporters and groups requested through Twitter for the provision of the facility of Candidate list in the app. This was a revolution in terms of usage of the application. Now, not only did the PwD app user get the list of their constituency candidates, but they also got the contesting candidates list in the same order as that in the ballot paper. Thus a PwD user with or visual deficiency could hear the list of the candidates before they cast their vote. This liberated the PwD app user from any assistance they would need during the poll day. The application was used 21, 94, 951 times during the elections wherein PwD users marked themselves, ‘applied’ for the Voter Registration and also registered complaints using the app.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>6</strong></th>
<th><strong>7</strong></th>
<th><strong>8</strong></th>
<th><strong>9</strong></th>
<th><strong>10</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Find Polling Booth:</strong> To make the polling stations accessible for Persons with Disabilities, booth locator feature has been included in the app. Booth locator helps the user to find the location and direct them to the booth location from the current location.</td>
<td><strong>Navigate to Polling Booth:</strong> Incorporation and integration of Google Maps help the PwDs voters to easily navigate to the polling booths during elections.</td>
<td><strong>On-Call Support:</strong> In order to make it more comfortable for Persons with Disabilities, ECI offers on-call support on toll free helpline number 1950. The assistance related to any electoral services would be provided to the user by taking his/her minimal information like name, number or address only. The PwDs would never be asked to leave their comfort zone to get the task done.</td>
<td><strong>Interaction Controls:</strong> Talk Back feature which allows interaction using speech, vibration and audible feedback for users who are unable to operate smartphones. The enlarged graphics like text and icons, high contrast themes, structured headlines, and better typography enhances the readability of the content.</td>
<td><strong>Easy To Use:</strong> This App has been designed keeping easy and interactive user interface in view. The content has been classified based upon the user’s disability. PwD users with minimal technical knowledge can easily use the app to claim all the benefits like the request for a wheelchair, mark as PwD, and others without leaving their home.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SVEEP INITIATIVES

Voters connect during Lok Sabha Election 2019

Dr. Aarti Aggarwal
Senior Consultant SVEEP, ECI

India is a vast country and the largest democracy in the world with 910.10 million registered voters. The varied geographical and cultural topography of the country makes Indian elections a gigantic exercise indeed!

It has been the endeavor of the Election Commission of India to hold free, fair, peaceful, transparent, inclusive, accessible, ethical & participative elections. Elections are celebrated as the biggest festival of the country cutting across caste, creed, region and religion. In this context, the 17th General Election was aptly termed ‘Desh Ka Maha Tyohar’ or Festival of Festivals.

The Lok Sabha Election was conducted in seven phases spread across the period of two months between April – May, 2019 which witnessed the collective efforts of over 12 million election officials to ensure the successful conduct of the world’s largest democratic exercise. It resulted in participation of 613 million voters resulting in the highest ever voter turnout of 67.47% as well as the lowest gender gap of 0.1% in the country.

Voter education has been an indispensible part of the entire process. The Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation program, better known as SVEEP, is the flagship program of the Election Commission of India for voter education, spreading voter awareness and promoting electoral literacy in India. Institutionalized in 2009, SVEEP’s primary goal has been to build a truly participative democracy in India by encouraging all eligible citizens to vote and make an informed decision during the elections. The programme is based on multiple interventions (general as well as targeted), which are designed according to the socio-economic, cultural, linguistic and demographic profile of the state as well as the history of electoral participation in previous rounds of elections.

In Lok Sabha Elections 2019, various novel practices in pursuit of the Election Commission of India’s motto of ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’ were adopted by States/UTs of the country to conduct free, fair and accessible elections.

Following are National (adopted all over India), Widespread (taken up in certain regions) and Distinctive (a specific state level activity) exemplary innovations & initiatives that contributed to making Lok Sabha election 2019 a great success!
1. Reaching out to young & future voters through ELCs

An Electoral Literacy Club (ELC) is a platform to engage school students (IXth to XIIth class) through interesting activities and hands-on experience to sensitize them on their electoral rights and familiarise them with the electoral process of registration and voting. ELCs are also present in colleges, and rural communities at Polling Station level where they are known as Chunav Pathshalas. Dedicated Officers have been appointed at District & State Level for proper functioning of ELCs and Chunav Pathshalas.

2. ELC resource materials in Regional languages

At Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELCs), learning meets fun. Resource Material has been developed with activities and games designed to stimulate and motivate students provoking them to think and ask questions. Through ELC, Election Commission of India aims at strengthening the culture of electoral participation among young and future voters. ELC resource materials were translated into local languages and contexts by different states to ensure that the stakeholders can understand and relate better to the study materials.

3. Committee for Accessible Elections at National & State Level

To make elections accessible & hassle free has been a priority of Election Commission of India. Committees has been set up at National as well as State level to work with the stakeholders at various levels, analyse the challenges and strategise on the way ahead to ensure due facilitation of PwD voters at the Polling Stations.

4. Door to Door Registration for PwDs

To facilitate Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and motivate them to come out and participate in the electoral process, Booth Level Officer (BLO), Conducted door-to-door registration. Until now, 68.28 lakh PwDs have been registered so far.

5. Assured Minimum Facilities at each Polling Station

Assured minimum facilities (AMF) constitutes provision for ramp, drinking water, adequate furniture, proper lighting, proper signage, helpdesk and toilet. This effort was taken to ensure wholesome and constructive participation of each voter. These measures ensure effective engagement in the Electoral process especially for the Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and senior citizens.

6. Sensitisation Training of Election Officials

Sensitization training of Election Officials regarding the special needs of Persons with Disabilities was conducted across Election Offices in the country. This
included, basic sign Language Sensitization, Etiquette and manner training, development of campaign material inaccessible format was also discussed. In addition to this, Sign Language Interpreters were also deployed at Polling Stations for better facilitation of Voters’ with Disabilities.

7. Merchandise

Merchandise items like T-shirts, Mugs, Badges, Mouse Pads, Coasters, Pen Stands, Mobile Pop Ups and Key Chains were designed and distributed to spread motivational voting messages.

Commission of India, conducted on-air and ground activities throughout the Poll Campaign. Besides different kinds of programs and phone-in interviews, they also promoted mobile apps and played audio bytes of the Election icons to reach out to more people.

9. Pick & Drop Facilities for PwDs

Use of public transports to facilitate voters with disabilities on the poll day, free pick up and drop was provided to the polling station. The facility can also be availed through PwD App by Persons with Disabilities.

10. Street Plays on Voter Awareness

Street Plays and Nukkad Nataks were organized to reach out to different sections of the society through street plays that spread message on importance of elections and made them aware of their electoral rights in rural as urban areas.

11. Heena Art on Elections

Mehendi is a popular art form in India in which decorative designs are created on a person’s body mostly hands, using a henna paste. Mehendi Competitions were organized on the various themes including democracy and right to vote to engage more women in the SVEEP activities.

12. Rangoli colours appeal to Masses

Rangoli is an art form in which patterns are created on the floor or the ground using materials such as coloured rice, dry flour, coloured sand or flower petals on the eve of festivals. Therefore to mark the celebrations of the festival of democracy rangoli competition were organized in various parts of the country in schools, colleges as well as communities.

13. Human Chains involved thousands

With an aim to reach out to the common man on the street, Human Chains were created. These mobilized a large number of people around the city and varied from a long chain to forming shapes of Indian Flag, ECI logo, Accessible Elections Logo and Lok Sabha Elections Logo.
14. Volunteers to aid at Polling Station

Volunteers known as MateData Mitra were engaged from NCC/NSS/Scout & Guides and deployed at the polling stations for Voters’ facilitation, especially assisting Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and senior citizens to reach the Polling Station, offering drinking water and all kinds of assistance to Voters during poling.

15. Competitions Galore at Educational Institutions

Painting Competitions, Slogan writing competitions and Debates were organized in schools and colleges to sensitize young and future voters on the themes of democracy, right to vote, Importance of every vote etc.

personnel. This motivated women voters in rural as well as urban areas of the country.

17. Pledge Letter to appeal to Young & Future Voters

Sankalp Patras or Pledge Letter is issued to the family through the school students, who get it signed by their parents and adult family members pledging to vote in the upcoming election. They also pledge to motivate friends and neighbours to cast their vote.

The pledge letters carrying the signature of the parent are submitted back to the school who pass it on to the district administration. With the help of the pledge letters, the district administration is able to reach out to a large number of families ahead of polling.

16. All Women Polling Station

Started as an innovative idea in West Bengal in the 2014 General Elections, all women managed polling booths have now become a major highlight in the elections. For the first time in Lok Sabha Election 2019, all the women polling stations were set up in all constituencies of India where all the officers were women including the security

18. Reaching out through Election Icons

Numerous non-partisan famous personalities from different fields were nominated as Election Icons. These included sportsmen, cricketers, actors and singers as also accomplished persons from other arenas. They played a significant role in reaching out to the masses through different communication channels.

19. All services a click away

Election Commission of India launched various mobile apps for different purposes for the facilitation of voters.

Voter Helpline App – To ease the registration process, changing of the constituency, checking the name in the electoral roll & facilitation of voters among other services

Mx. Democracy – a digital game on electoral literacy provides crisp information regarding different aspects of electoral process in an interesting and playful manner

cVigil App – To report the violations of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and any other unethical behavior during elections for the real time redressal of the complaint

PwD App – For the ease of identification and registration of PwDs and availing the other services like pick & drop and wheelchair facility on the poll day

Voter Turnout App – To check the real time turnout during the counting of votes and live updates on Election results.
20. EVM & VVPAT Familiarisation Camps

EVM & VVPAT Familiarisation camps were conducted across the country to give hands-on experience to the voters ahead of Lok Sabha Polls. Such familiarisation camps were held at populated areas of the city/town/village by the election officials which made it possible for the common man to clarify apprehensions regarding the use and reliability of the machine.

21. National Campaign on TV & Cinema

A national SVEEP campaign for Lok Sabha Election 2019 was taken up on different forms of media. Various electoral awareness video spots were telecast on 12 channels including private, news and general entertainment channels from March 10, 2019 to May 19, 2019. The video spots on various aspects of voter education were aired from February 2019 on DD National and DD News for 110 days. Moreover, the spots were also being screened in theatres/multiplexes pan-India through Films Division since last 6 months.

22. Hoardings & Banners

Election Commission of India also launched the outdoor publicity campaign throughout India. These included Display Board in 22 cities, Airport Hoarding in 15 cities and other locations such as Bus Stands, Animation Display and Digital Display Boards etc.

23. Use of Social media to reach out

A social media campaign was launched on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram as well as through Google posts for the tech savvy masses to connect them to elections.

24. Launch of Braille EPIC

During the National Consultation on Accessible Elections, Commission launched the facility of Braille EPIC (Electoral Photo Identity Card) for the blind voters. Ahead of Lok Sabha Elections 2019, Braille EPICs were distributed by the respective State Election Offices.

25. Democracy Train

For the first time ever, Election Commission of India reached out to the masses through Indian Railways. Trains traversing length and breadth of country were vinyl wrapped with #GoVote and regional messages on elections with coaches dedicated to different states as per the route. These included Kerala Express, Himsagar Express, Guwahati Express, Howrah Express, Jhelum Express, Konark Express, DikshaBhumi Express.

26. Priority Access/ separate queue for Voters with Disabilities

Persons with Disabilities and senior citizens were provided priority access/ separate queue at the polling station on the poll day. All possible steps were taken so as to ensure that PwDs/senior citizens are not required to wait in the queue. Proper sitting arrangement too was provided.

27. Wall graffiti to motivate Youth

Numerous states created Wall graffiti to motivate the common man especially the youth for elections. Walls in the populated area of the cities were selected and
28. School Elections to understand the voting process

Electoral Literacy Clubs educate school students about electoral processes through different kinds of entertaining activities. School Elections for choosing student representatives were conducted via Electoral Literacy Clubs to enable the students to understand the entire process of electing their representatives in schools at present and later for their nation.

29. Familiarizing students with the Parliamentary system

Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELCs) conducted a field visit of its members to the State Legislative Assembly. The field visit was conducted by states like Jammu & Kashmir and Meghalaya. Now many more states are organizing such visits to familiarize students from schools/colleges with the Parliamentary system.

30. PwD managed Polling Station

In numerous states, PwD managed Polling stations were set up. This meant that entire election personnel staff at the polling booth included Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). The aim is to empower PwD officials and encourage PwD electors to come out and participate in the electoral process in large numbers.

31. Youth Marathon for Voting

To counter urban apathy especially among youth, numerous states organized youth marathon with election theme. These youth Marathons were conducted in collaboration of Colleges, CSOs and NGOs working in the field of elections. Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and other states reached out to the youth through these marathons.

32. Divyang Sarathi and Divyang Dollis facilitate

Divyang Sarathi and Divyang Dollis were used to facilitate Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and also senior citizens in the hilly areas of the country as the roads to the polling station are not accessible due to the mountainous terrain and other tough geographical conditions. Uttarakhand, Himachal, J&K among others facilitated PwDs and senior citizens through these.

33. Road shows & Rallies spread election messages

Various SVEEP activities such as Road shows, Human rallies and Cycle rallies were organized to spread the information and messages on voting and also other relevant information for the poll day.

34. Adjustable furniture for accessible elections

With an aim to facilitate the PwD voters, Lok Sabha 2019 witnessed numerous new initiatives. In many states, adjustable furniture was used in numerous polling
stations to make a way for the wheelchair and also a specific table height was used to ensure accessibility to EVM for Dwarf voters.

35. Third Gender motivates all to vote

Election Commission of India gives electors an option to register themselves as a Third Gender too. These elections witnessed higher participation of third gender persons. In Maharashtra, not only did they cast their vote in large numbers but they also spread a message on value of each vote. In Delhi, a group of third gender appealed to masses through a rally, holding voting messages placards across the city.

36. Voting Messages on Gas Cylinders & ATMs

All mediums were used to reach out to the voters. In numerous states, with an aim to reach out to the homemakers, voting messages were pasted on Gas Cylinders. Moreover, the ATMs at important junctions and banks in many states showed messages on elections to each user.

37. Radio Jingles to motivate voters

Radio Jingles attract all. Numerous radio jingles were prepared and aired through different mediums in many states. The radio jingle prepared by Delhi was aired on the FM Channels. It informed the listener regarding inclusion/amends in the electoral roll ahead of the poll dates in a musical manner.

38. Corporate Sector joins hand for Voter Awareness

Corporate Sector and Civil Society Organizations played a positive role in spreading awareness on elections in many states. In Jharkhand, 43 corporate entities conducted SVEEP activities with their CSR fund.

39. Voter Festivals organized for awareness

Voter Festivals and Democracy Concerts were organized to motivate voters and educate them via games, songs, dances and other interesting activities in many states and UTs. These festivals witnessed huge participation of all age groups.

40. Appeal through Memes

All kinds of media were used to reach out to the voters. Due to the wide publicity of the humorous contents on social media, Voting related memes were circulated by many States/UTs to catch the attention of youth and the tech savvy.

41. Voting becomes fashionable

Voting became a fashion statement with elections chosen as a theme for fashion shows. A ramp walk was organised for Ethical Voting in Kerala and the initiative was replicated by other states too like Chhattisgarh and Goa among others.

42. Eco Friendly Polling Stations

Many states/UTs propagated the idea of green elections where use of plastic was discouraged throughout the election period. Plants and earthen pots were kept inside the polling stations.
43. Paintings on Road

In number of states, paintings of various kinds such as oil based / 3D paintings on the roads gave messages on importance of voting. Busiest junctions of the cities were chosen and they caught the attention of all passing by.

44. Mascots on Voter Awareness

Mascots were created to spread voter awareness for many states/UTs. Mr. Bahanebaaz from Madhya Pradesh is shown as an apathetic voter; ShriMat and ShriMatii a voting couple from Gujarat and Rajasthan selected chiraya as their icon. All these proved to be a good source of attraction for the public.

45. Information Posters on Voting

Throughout the elections, informative posters were distributed to inform, educate and motivate voters to participate in the electoral processes. There were also circulated to all Gram Panchayats, Mahila-Mandals, Yuvak-Mandals, Self-Help Groups through Electoral Registration Officers, for wide publicity. They were also displayed in Government/private offices as also banks etc.

46. Sand Art on Elections

Different kinds of Sand Art were created on the beaches in numerous states. They created a momentum on elections and connected the common man to the electoral process.

47. Signature Campaigns for Voting

A signature campaign to commit for voting was organised in different regions across the country on various occasions. People from all age groups and sections of society participated. The Campaign caught eyeballs as it was put up in the most populated areas of the City.

48. Appeal through Regional/Folk medium

In the Lok Sabha Election 2019, many states/UTs launched educational and motivational TV Commercials in regional language to appeal to masses. Regional/folk songs spread awareness to the remotest corners of the country.

49. SMSs sent to Motivate Voters

Free awareness SMSs were sent by many states to voters reminding them about important dates as also informing on important documents and helpline numbers for election processes.

50. Crèche Facility

To facilitate new mothers, crèche were created in many polling stations across the country. This eased the voting process for the mothers as they left the child in the crèche whilst they voted comfortably.

51. Voting Messages on Milk Sachets

Elections were Omnipresent. Messages on elections were printed on Ponlait Milk Sachets in Puducherry and Paras Milk in Rajasthan among other states.
52. Festivities at the Highest Polling Station

At 15,256 ft, surrounded by the snow clad mountains, Tashigang in Himachal Pradesh is the world’s highest polling station. The festival of democracy was celebrated with full enthusiasm in Tashigang where a Model Polling Station was established for 48 voters from two villages i.e. Tashigang and Gete. All the Poll Personnel as well as Voters were in their traditional attire singing folk songs and dancing.

53. Messages on Food Menus

In Bhilwada, Rajasthan, eateries had a special addition to their food menus! Voter Awareness Content was ingeniously placed and poll day related messaging was added to food menus of all eateries in town.

54. Regional Radio Channels Reach Out

Punjab collaborated with popular radio channels like MY FM and Big FM during conduct of General Election to Lok Sabha 2019. The seradio partners conducted on-air promotion of on-field Voter Awareness activities.

55. Dandiya Raas Event organized

Dandiya Raas, a traditional folk dance form of the state of Gujarat, was organized with election theme. Interestingly, EPIC card was substituted for entry passes and counters were set up to register those voters who had still not applied for Voter cards. There were even separate counters to check the names in Voter List and to get a demo of EVM and VVPAT machines.

56. Classes conducted for Conceptual Familiarisation

The state of Himachal Pradesh conducted classes for the conceptual familiarization of students with Centre-State relations and ‘First PastThe Post System’ to empower ELC members with knowledge on the basic functioning of the Parliamentary system.

57. Voting Tree in Bihar

This was a unique effort in Munger district in Bihar for voter awareness as well as environment awareness where one voting tree was planted in all 101 Gram Panchayats of Munger district. The idea behind the voting tree is to motivate electors infuture as well.

58. Mat Disha, an educational game

An educational game on ethical voting called Mat Disha (Mat means Vote & Disha means Direction) was developed by Goa. The game was designed in English, Hindi and Regional language apart from being made in an inclusive format for PwDs. A child friendly model of EVM was also designed with a cardboard dummy balloting unit to familiarise the ELC members with the functioning of EVMs.

59. 5-day Event in schools for ELC activities

A 5-day event was conducted across 1,500 schools in Buldhana district of Maharashtra State where students from all the schools of the district participated in
ELC activities for one hour every day.

60. Cabs Provide Free Pick & Drop

In the state of Karnataka and Chandigarh, transportation was provided free of cost to Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in collaboration with cab companies like Ola & Uber to ensure better facilitation.

61. Launch of I-Help

With the aim to empower voters through electoral literacy, Assam launched project ‘I-Help’ in collaboration with a network of 3000 Common Services Centres (CSC) in the state. Under this, citizens’ received sensitization on the usage of mobile apps like Voter Helpline App, cVigil App, PwD App. Apart from EVM-VVPAT familiarization training and door to door outreach programs for Persons with Disabilities, Digital Electoral Literacy Drives were also organized to assist voters in getting information enabling active democratic participation.

62. Special training sessions for election officials

Sikkim organized special training sessions to sensitize all officials involved in the election process on the needs of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) to ensure a hassle free experience for the voters.

63. Sign Language App created

Punjab developed a Sign Language App to facilitate polling for people with hearing disabilities. Essentially, the Voter Helpline App was re-created with video clips in sign language for better facilitation.

64. Vote Baraat & Satrangi Saptah from Rajasthan

Satrangi Saptah was a weeklong celebration where each day of the week was dedicated to a specific segment of the electorate. Activities like Deep Daan, Band Vadana long with pledge, Vote Baraat, Mahila March, Human Chain, Tricycle rally and Vote Marathon were a part of Satrangi Saptah (Rainbow Week).

(PwDs) along with wheel chair rallies to boost the morale of voters with disabilities.

66. Awareness camps for PwDs

Multiple Voter Awareness camps were conducted in Telangana on important topics like Sign Language, Assured Minimum Facilities (AMF) at the polling booths etc. Moreover, campaign material developed in Braille language was distributed for the ease of PwD voters.

67. Training for the use of PwD App

In the state of Tripura, all District and AC level IT Nodal Officers were provided training on the PwD App in order to ensure effective use of the application.

65. Sports event & Wheel Chair rallies for PwDs

In the state of Chandigarh, a cricket match was organised for Persons with Disabilities

68. Online Bookings for facilities at Polling Station

In Tamil Nadu, the facility of online wheelchair booking & queue management was
made available through a website to facilitate voters with disabilities.

69. Voters’ Park in Haryana

In the Gurugram Parliamentary Constituency of Haryana, the voters have traditionally been less enthusiastic about voting on the poll day. Therefore, a first of its kind ‘Voters’ Park’ was established to spread awareness among voters in Gurugram. The information display Boards/insignia-cum-entertainment features as well as selfie points in the Voters’ Park were used to attract visitors & motivate them to head out to vote on the poll day.

70. Saksham Etaawah-Logo

Uttar Pradesh created Saksham Etaawah – a wheelchair logo using 35,000 thumb imprints of citizens! This was a great initiative to sensitise people towards the needs of PwDs.

71. BLO sensitisation workshop

In the state of Nagaland, a workshop by special educators was conducted to sensitise BLOs on all matters related to PwDs and further enhance their capabilities in identifying and facilitating PwDs.

72. Post card campaign by Telangana

To create awareness among voters in Telangana, a Post Card Campaign was launched wherein each household was sent a letter by the Chief Electoral Officer encouraging voters to cast their vote. It also provided important information related to electoral process. A total of 1 crore post cards were distributed, covering 83,03,612 households!

73. A record feat in Nizamabad

Telangana set a unique record with 175 farmers contesting for Member of Parliament seat in the General Elections 2019. To conduct a hassle free election - the FLC, mock poll and the commissioning of 25,000 Ballot Units, 2,000 Control Units and 2,000 VVPATs was completed involving 600 engineers and 2,000 personnel in a short time span of just 3 days! An army of vehicles was used for the movement of men and machines - all fitted with GPS tracking to monitor their movement. The management of election process in Nizamabad PC stands out as a role model for the entire country.

74. Magnifying Sheets available at Polling Booths

To make elections accessible and hassle free, Delhi made Magnifying Sheets available at every polling booth for better facilitation of electors with low vision.

75. Mapping of PwDs in consultation with BLOs

A joint initiative was taken up with the social welfare department of Assam to conduct comprehensive mapping of PwDs in consultation with Chandraprabha Baideus, Divyang Sarothis and BLOs in order to facilitate the voters with disabilities for a barrier-free and inclusive Accessible Election. Mapping included moral boosting, counselling, ethical and informed voting and escort services during the poll day etc.

76. Sugamya app for PwDs

Madhya Pradesh created an app called Sugamya for encouraging PwD voters, which helped in the registration of 4.5 lakhs PwD voters, 4.2 lakhs pregnant women and 5.05 lakhs old age voters through its portal. Queue-Jump Passes were distributed to all who registered through the app.

77. International Day of PwDs celebrated

Maharashtra celebrated International Day of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) with great enthusiasm in all districts. Various events, competitions and activities were organised and PwD voters came out in large numbers to celebrate.
78. Visually impaired music band as State Icons

‘Light after Dark’, Meghalaya’s first visually impaired music band was identified and deployed as the State Icon, giving impetus to the participation of PwDs in the electoral process.

79. Targeted Taglines to motivate voters

In the state of Chandigarh, different taglines were developed to appeal to specific as well as targeted audiences. For example, ‘Eat Pure, Vote for Sure’ was the tagline used in Hotels in Chandigarh and ‘Vote for a Healthy Democracy’ was used for Doctors.

80. Dialogue with the young electors

In Andaman and Nicobar Islands, young electors were made aware of the importance of democracy and the right to vote by the traditional community elders/village captains through multiple dialogues and community discussions.

81. Aaideur Chora—A public sphere for women

The State of Assam launched ‘Aaideur Chora’ (a public sphere for Women) initiative to educate women voters about the SVEEP (Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation) Programme. More than 2 lakh Self-Help Groups (SHGs) were reached out to along with other government departments with an aim to sensitize rural women towards their electoral rights. Weekly discussions on the value of democracy, ethical voting and another voting related information were conducted. Apart from this, more than 2,870 Village Ambassadors distributed information leaflets in local languages amongst prospective voters especially women.

82. Dedicated Volunteers for PwDs

In the State of Delhi, volunteers for voter assistance were deployed in all polling stations. The volunteers comprised mainly of school children between the age group of 15 to 17 years.

83. Buses spread awareness

To reach a large number of people ahead of elections, DTC buses all over Delhi were wrapped with voter awareness messages and appeals to citizens to come out and vote on the poll day.
84. Metro trains attracts All

Five Metro trains of Delhi Metro were wrapped with voter awareness content along with the pictures of popular Election Icons to appeal to the young demographic and tackle urban apathy towards voting in the capital.

85. Stamps with voting messages

Stamps with messages on voting and important information were developed and stamped on bills, cinema tickets, receipts, postal envelopes & courier parcels, etc in the state of Gujarat during elections.

86. Educational Institutions ensure enrolment of new voters

In the state of Himachal Pradesh, the Heads of Educational Institutions were roped in to ensure that all 18+ eligible youths enrolled in their college/university are registered as voters.

87. Taxi coupons were provided to PwD voters

In the state of Mizoram, Government vehicles were assigned for transportation of PwDs on Poll Day, and PwD voters were given the facility of Taxi Coupons for easier facilitation on Poll Day.

88. Voting messages through Food Delivery App

Rajasthan collaborated with popular food delivery App – Zomato to send Voting Messages to voters ahead of poll day.

89. Sensitised Ethnic Community Leaders spread awareness

In its effort to spread voter awareness up to the grass root level, Sikkim organized a sensitization program for the leaders of ethnic communities of the State and the NGOs working for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). The main objective of this was to disseminate correct information about election procedures and processes through community leaders so that there is no room for the spread of false information and rumours.

90. Green Election in Kerala

Following a ban on the use of flex and non-biodegradable materials during electioneering, the state of Kerala held a clean and green election. A booklet was made explaining all the ways in which the green protocol can be adhered to and special events were organized by officials like cycle rallies, and processions by students. Green protocol volunteers in different districts, signature campaign on cloth banners, streetplay on green election, flash mobs, beach run, sand art, quizzes, celebrity endorsements and messages from district SVEEP icons disseminated the message further. The public was also encouraged to come up and report any violations that were noticed anywhere in the state for immediate action from authorities.

91. PwD kit distributed

A PwD Kit with Voter Assistance Guides (regular as well as in Braille), Posters in Braille and Voter Slips (in Braille/ normal - as required) were distributed to Voters with Disabilities well before the Polling Day in Maharashtra.

92. Voter Awareness Programme for Tribals

A Voter Awareness Programme was conducted by students in the tribal hamlets of Attapadi in Kerala. After school hours and on holidays, the students, along with the teachers, visited each and every house in the tribal hamlets of Attapadi to educate the inhabitants on the importance of exercising their right to vote and distributed informational booklets and posters. The residents also learnt to operate the EVM-VVPAT machines. Subsequently, due to the consistent efforts of the students and officials - about 98 % of the voters exercised their voting rights. This is probably the first time in India that polling rates
improved in the remotest of tribal areas through the involvement of school students.

93. Nothing holds back this PwD Anganwadi Worker

In Bihar, Lalti Devi of District Buxar is an anganwadi worker with locomotor disability. She is married to a Person with Disabilities (PwDs) as well. Undaunted by her physical limitations, Lalti Devi earns her livelihood by serving the children at Anganwadi Centres in her village. During elections she also visited each household to motivate voters to come out and exercise their right to vote.

94. Instagram Influencers reached out to the Youth

Mizoram started a Young Voters Club where top 20 Instagram users with highest followers appealed to younger generations especially those who were found to be indifferent to exercising their franchise. Young Voters Fest was organized by Young Voters Club for college students with events like debates, slogan writing competition, elocution and music competitions.

95. Voter Interactive Session

An interactive session covering topics like Voter Awareness, Urban Apathy, Ethical Voting, Accessible Election and importance of voting was conducted in Uttarakhand for young & first time voters to inform them regarding their democratic right. More than 4,000 students from different colleges took part in this session.

96. Mobile Polling Booth for monks

The Songha Constituency in Sikkim established a unique mobile polling booth designed to cater to the wandering Buddhist monks of the state.

97. Polling Station for one voter

In the State of Gujarat, deep into the Gir Forest, full of lions, a polling station was set up for only one voter. Also, Malagaon in Andhra Pradesh had a single voter. This shows the commitment of polling officials to the motto ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’.

98. Open Mic Café Event

In the state of Meghalaya, in order to tackle urban apathy, an Open Mic Café event was organized. Numerous artists reached out to the man on the streets, as they shared their belief in Indian electoral process through music.

99. Selfie Points at Polling Stations

To make voting a memorable experience, selfie points were created at the polling booths decorated with voting messages. Millions of people clicked themselves at selfie points and uploaded their pictures online on different social media handles. This initiative was applauded offline as well as online as it motivated their friends and followers of people to go out and vote.

100. Signature Campaigns for Voting

A signature campaign to commit for voting was organized across the country on various occasions during sweek activities. People of all age and sectors would come and sign on the flex put up in the populated area of the city to catch more eyeballs.

101. Vows for Democracy

Newly-weds were seen casting their votes on their wedding day in various part of the country. Their commitment towards their right to vote set an example for many.

Inputs:
Aradhana Sharma, Executive, SVEEP
ELECTORAL REFORMS IN INDIA

Chandra Bhushan Kumar
Deputy Election Commissioner, ECI

Evolution of electoral democracy in modern times has been a continuous process. By the time, India got its independence from colonial government, there has been a flurry of emergence of independent nations, particularly in Asia and Africa. By the end of 20th century, a number of such countries after experimenting with elections, could not continue to remain a democracy for various internal and external reasons. India, world’s largest democracy, during this period not only survived, but thrived as electoral democracy. Political scientists and opinion makers, while taking note of this development, attributed this success to the role of Election Commission of India, played in addressing the challenges and concerns every time in free, fair, transparent and credible manner. This article, outlines the past electoral reforms carried out by the Commission in these seven decades and lists out certain ongoing reforms, which will help in further strengthening the process of elections in the country.

Reforms, a Seven Decade Legacy

In her investigation of preparation of first electoral roll in free India, Ornith Shani (2018) makes an interesting observation that the modern India was successfully broke from its colonial imagination of electoral management and created its own, indigenous and all inclusive electoral roll. Commission amongst many firsts, introduced the concept of institution of Chief Electoral Officer, which was necessary to carry out the electoral activities in uniform manner in this diverse country, indigenously patented indelible ink, which was to check the impersonation but also it emerged as one of the most visible symbols of electoral participation of a common citizen, symbol allocation to political parties, which was to streamline the concept of multi-party democracy, ballot box, which remained the symbol of election in popular imagination till it was replaced by the Electronic Voting machine (EVM) five decades after. By the third elections in 1962, a marking system of ballot paper was introduced for each elector. However, the political situation in the country in mid-1960s forced some of the pundits to pronounce the failure of Indian experiment. The London Times (1967) announced, “The great experiment of developing India within a democratic framework has failed. (Indians will soon vote) in the fourth - and surely last - general election.” The participation (61.33% voting) and success of 1967 general elections proved all wrong.

The Commission has utilized information technology and its applications in major way to streamline the electoral processes

However, during 1970s and 1980s, new challenges in terms of political slugfest, expenditure, muscle power started threatening the electoral process in some of the areas in the country. During this phase Commission came out with the concept of Model Code of Conduct¹, an ethical code of good behavior during the campaign, which was accepted by all the political parties. In 1978, the Commission also started exploring the possibility of Electronic Voting Machine replacing the ballot box, which became synonymous with booth capturing in certain north Indian States. 1990s witnessed the focus of Commission on elector photo identity cards and strict enforcement of MCC. All these helped in making Commission a more credible institution in the eyes of voters.

Judiciary, through its various pronouncements, further strengthened the efforts of the Commission. In its decision in Mohinder Singh Gill vs ECI (1978), it endorsed the use of plenary power of the Commission under Article 324 to issue such directions which are not anticipated under exiting statutory provisions.
Emerging Challenges and Reforms

21st century world is a digital world and its implications for elections are faced world over. On one side, it provides opportunities to redesign the services and processes for seamless and optimum uses, and on another side, it brings unknown and uncertain challenges for the electoral system itself. Besides it, the use of money power, muscle power and media power to influence the electoral process poses major threat to the purity and the integrity of the elections. India is no exception to this situation.

The Commission has utilized information technology and its applications in major way to streamline the electoral processes including electors’ interface on online platform, transmission of results, cVigil (an application to empower the citizen to report any electoral malpractices for quick remedial action) etc. Commission is also considering the collection and collation of expenditure details using MIS for further appropriate action. Commission is also mulling the idea of a single form for voter’s interface replacing other existing forms. Once in operation, it will help the voters immensely.

Criminalization of politics has been a major challenge in India. Recently, Supreme Court mandated that all those candidates (and the political parties who set up such candidates), who have criminal antecedents must publicise in print and electronic media as voters have a right to know about their candidates. Commission was able to implement this direction successfully, as Legislative department, Government of India notified it quickly.

Money power in election is another concern as it has the capacity to induce the electors and hence it impures the electoral process. Commission has strengthened its expenditure monitoring mechanism and with the introduction of C-Vigil it has empowered every citizen to report such cases from the place of incidence itself. Recently, the Supreme Court has asked the government to set up a mechanism to assess the assets and liabilities of the candidates. Commission through its voter education programme, SVEEP, has also given special emphasis on ‘ethical voting’. Social media is new player in the election arena. Fake news, paid news, privacy, profiling, all these menaces are affecting the electoral processes world over. Recently, Commission after considering the report of Sinha Committee on section 126 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, has asked the Government to amend the section by including print media and intermediaries so that its use during last 48 hours from the close of the poll remain restricted. At present, it only restricts electronic media. Commission has also directed to evolve a comprehensive code of ethics for all the media for elections by engaging all the stakeholders.

Electoral reform is a continuous process and Commission since its inception has taken necessary measures to address the challenges and issues faced or emerging in elections.

1 Model code of conduct (MCC), though initiated in Kerala in 1960, the Commission made it universal in 1968.
ENSURING ETHICAL ELECTIONS

Vijay Kumar Pandey
Director Law, ECI

India has recently concluded its 17th Lok Sabha elections, the greatest democratic exercise in world history. Indian elections conjure descriptions such as ‘monumental’ or ‘mammoth’ due to the overwhelming number of people that participate in them. In 2014, over 8000 candidates from about 460 political parties participated1. India has conducted elections with the highest levels of credibility and transparency since its Independence.

Elections are the most integral part of a democracy since they reflect the values and beliefs of the people towards their political environment. While politics is the act of dealing with political power, election, as a process, legitimizes such power. Elections can be an effective tool for establishing the sovereignty of the people only when they are free and fair. The last few decades have seen an increasing influence of criminal elements in the political arena. Corrupt politicians with criminal records, caste/religion based politics, and allegations of vote buying continue to mar the democratic process. Some 24% of Parliamentarians faced criminal charges in 2004, and by 2014 this number had risen to 34%2. Some legislators amass disproportionate amount of wealth and assets between elections either directly or indirectly through their associates.

The Supreme Court and the Election Commission have taken a strict view against such practices and have introduced measures to curb the same. In Union of India vs. Association for Democratic Reforms3 and People’s Union for Civil Liberties vs. Union of India4, the Supreme Court gave a historic ruling, stating that every contesting candidate has to declare their criminal records, financial records and educational qualifications along with their nomination paper. In Lily Thomas vs. Union of India5, the court delved deeper into the issue and removed the provision that allowed convicted Members to continue sitting in office till their appeal is disposed of. Last year, in Public Interest Foundation vs. Union of India6, the Supreme Court directed candidates to provide information regarding criminal cases pending against them. With a view of decriminalizing elections, the Election Commission has gone a step further to recommended that persons charged with cognisable offences shall be debarred from contesting in elections, at the stage of framing of charges, provided the offence is punishable by imprisonment of minimum 5 years. As a safeguard against frivolous filing, the case must be filed at least 6 months prior to the election7.

The Election Commission has reiterated its longstanding demand that political parties should limit their spending on a candidate to not more than 50% of the candidate’s expenditure limit.

It has also recommended that swift action against those attempting to misuse religious sentiments through religious rallies in places of worship should be taken. Recently, the Election Commission has warned political parties against using the Sabarimala temple matter as a campaign issue and that such an act would amount to violation of the Model Code of Conduct8.

Recent years have seen an accelerating cost of elections in the country, opacity in electoral finance and lack of transparency and oversight. This not only undermines democracy, good governance and the rule of law, but also has negative consequences for economic development and the alleviation of poverty. The Election Commission has reiterated its longstanding demand that political parties should limit their spending on a candidate to not more than 50% of the candidate’s expenditure limit. The ECI has identified unchecked money power as one of the biggest concerns and has been rooting for capping
party and campaign expenses. Today, unequal access to political finance contributes to an uneven political playing field. The huge amount of money involved in election campaigns makes it impossible for those without access to large private funds to compete on the same level as those who are well funded. Money used in an opaque manner, may be black money or tainted money, weakens the law, as elected representatives become captive to those who supply such funds. Vote buying is another manifestation of such non-transparent use of money in elections. The process is still evolving and requires tremendous effort and cooperation from all stakeholders in order to ensure the purity of elections. Recently, in *Lok Prahari vs. Union of India*\(^9\), the Supreme Court held that information regarding sources of income of the candidates’ spouses and dependents shall also be declared. In view of this ruling, the Election Commission recommended amendments to the Nomination Form (Form 26- Affidavit) which have now been notified by the government. **The Election Commission has also introduced a cap on expenditure of the candidates to ensure a level playing field for all.** Other measures include filing details of financial contributions with the Election Commission\(^10\) in order to avail exemption in tax returns from the Income Tax authorities, prohibition on donation of cash above Rs. 2000/-, electoral bonds for funding and amendments in Foreign Contribution Regulation Act to control foreign funding. Transparency in electoral finance is the key to prevent policy capture and steps to ensure complete transparency in the source and expenditure of political donations has become an essential part of the Election Commission’s role.

Over the years, electoral reforms have been taken up by various committees such as the Vohra Committee Report on Criminalisation of Politics, Gupta Committee on State Funding of Elections, Law Commission Report on Reform of Electoral Laws, Second Administrative Reforms Commission, and Election Commission of India Proposed Electoral Reforms. There is a near unanimity in all the recommendations seeking to keep candidates with pending criminal cases against them outside the legislature and to break the nexus between politicians and criminals.

Despite judgments of the Supreme Court and steps taken by the Election Commission to curtail criminalization in Indian politics, there is still scope to further strengthen the system to make errant politicians and deviant political parties accountable. Keeping the sanctity of the electoral process intact requires a multi-pronged approach and a strong political will. It requires a consistent effort by all stakeholders to clean Indian politics. Conducting elections at such a cosmic scale is no easy feat, but India has proved that democracy is here to stay.

---

3. AIR 2002 SC 2112
4. (2003) 4 SCC 399
5. 2013 (5) SCJ 113
6. 2018 SCC Online SC 1617
7. *India. Election Commission of India. Proposed Electoral Reforms. 2017, Pg. 29*
10. Section 10A, Representation of the People Act, 1951
ENGAGING THROUGH COMMUNITY RADIO

Archana Kapoor and Esther Kar

In a participative democracy, every vote matters as everyone has a view on how his/her affairs should be run. It’s not a matter of whether the vote holds meaning only when it backs winner, but even those who support the loser or a contrarian point of view are critical for democracy as it helps in creating a liberal space where people can make choices without fear or favour. That’s the reason every vote matters and there is a need to create voter awareness in the country so that more and more informed citizenship steps out to exercise their constitutionally mandated franchise.

In a recognition of the community radio stations’ ability to work at the grass root level to ensure better participation in this democratic exercise, the Election Commission of India decided to utilise community radio stations across the country for creating awareness and communicating the importance of voter registration and participation in this democracy where every vote counts.

In a first of its kind initiative, in early February 2019, the Election Commission of India partnered Seeking Modern Applications for Real Transformation (SMART), a non-profit, to enhance the capacities of 150 Community Radio Stations located in 110 districts across 24 states, to build voter awareness and encourage first time voters to exercise their right to vote.

To ensure that no voter is left behind, SMART hosted three workshops in Delhi, with the support of the Election Commission of India to share information on the history of elections, the new technologies for ease of voters, app driven facilities, as well as on simple issues of registration of a voter, how to change an address, or your constituency as well as how to empower the people to serve as watchdogs to safeguard democracy.

Armed with information that could ensure participation and access to voters in the grand Festival of Democracy, 146 CR stations attended the workshops and signed up to produce programmes in their local dialects, so that the information and processes about elections could be more comprehensible to lay voters. Most of the IEC material shared by the ECI was in Hindi, thus the stations from the non-Hindi speaking regions produced theme songs and promotional material too, to enhance electoral education among the most vulnerable communities, encourage first time voters, and elucidate the importance of voting. The radio stations worked with the common purpose of contributing to increasing voter enrolment and participation of ordinary citizens in the ‘Festival of Democracy’.

Community Radio Stations overstretched themselves to reach out the District Election Officers, Booth Level Officers, Electoral Registration officers, to get information on every aspect of the election process before the day of polling. They also served as grievance centres, and helped dismiss many a doubt on the credibility of EVM and VVPAT, composition of the polling booth, enrolment of migrant workers, homeless, tribal persons, and persons with disabilities (PWD), service voters, NRIs and other
Formats used for Programming

Almost all formats of production were experimented, with at least two stations broadcasting in 4-5 local dialects and developing content keeping in mind the diversity of languages in their geographies.

- Magazine
- Documentary
- Drama
- Storytelling
- Interview
- Vox Pop
- Jingles
- Quiz

marginalised communities. The stations produced and broadcast content in Hindi, English, Assamese, Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Seharia, Gondi, Bhil, Mundari, Sadri, Maithili and other dialects.

The efforts brought some positive results, particularly with regard to Persons with Disabilities and helped them download the app in Bihar, in some areas the programmes led to vehicles being provided by ECI for people living in remote hilly areas like in Uttarakhand, whereas in many regions of Uttar Pradesh, women felt encouraged to come out in large numbers to vote. Together the stations produced 700 programmes and broadcast them over the different phases of the elections. The experience of the Community Radio Stations during the run up to elections was unique and contributed immensely in making this election a success.

150 Stations consented
146 Attended

139 Stations Produced 5 Programs each

Total 695 Episodes produced
States covered 23

= 40 Languages and Dialects
Masters 15 English 15 Hindi
Population Covered = 30 Million
Outreach Activities = 350
Portal: voices.smartngo.org
Audios uploaded on
https://soundcloud.com/radiofestivalofdemocracy
The Indian Elections -V Mitchell, New York, NY

It is truly the greatest show on Earth, an ode to a diverse & democratic ethos, where 700 million + of humanity vote, providing their small part in directing their ancient civilization into the future.

It is no less impressive when done in a neighborhood which includes destabilizing & violent Pakistan, China, and Burma.

It’s challenges are immense, more so probably than anywhere else, particularly in development & fending off terrorism — but considering these challenges & its neighbors, it is even more astounding that the most diverse nation on Earth, with hundreds of languages, all religions & cultures, is not only surviving, but thriving.

The nation:

Where Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism & Sikhism were born;

Which is the second largest Muslim nation on Earth;

Where Christianity has existed for 2000 years;

Where the oldest Jewish synagogues & Jewish communities have resided since the Romans burnt their 2nd temple;

Where the Dalai Lama & the Tibetan government in exile reside;

Where the Zoroastrians from Persia have thrived since being thrown out of their ancient homeland; Where Armenians, Syrians & many others have come to live; where the Paris-based OECD said was the largest economy on Earth for 1500 of the last 2000 years, including the 2nd largest, only 200 years ago;

Where 3 Muslim Presidents have been elected,

Where a Sikh was a Prime Minister & the head of a major party a Catholic Italian woman,

Where a President was also a woman, succeeding a Muslim President who as a rocket scientist and a Revered Hero of the Nation;

Where a booming economy is lifting 40 million out of poverty each year & is expected to have the majority of its population in the middle class already, equal to the entire US population, by 2025;

Where its optimism & vibrancy is manifested in its movies, arts, economic growth & voting, despite all the incredible challenges & hardships;

Where all the great powers are vying for influence, as it itself finds its place in the world.

Where all of this is happening, is India and as greater than 1/10th of humanity gets ready to vote, it is an inspiration to the entire World.

How Election 2019 aims to be an inclusive experience for the PwD voters

Dedicated Apps assisting in the voting process, wheelchair facilities, on-request pickup and drop facility from home to polling station, voters slip in Braille and sign language interpreters at polling booths — elections 2019 promises to be a barrier-free and inclusive experience for the PwD (Persons with Disability) voters. Among the range of apps introduced by the Election Commission of India (ECI) for the smooth management of the elections, the PwD one has been designed to help differently-abled people in the voting process. (ECI’s four apps on the Play Store - Suvidha, CVigil, PwD and Voter Helpline — are election-specific). Through the app, differently-abled people can request for new registration, change in particulars like address and mark themselves as PwD (Persons with Disability) voter with the help of this application. Individuals can also demand wheelchairs at the polling station by entering EPIC (Election Photo Identity Card) number. It is then the job of the election official to ensure that the wheelchair facility is provided. The PwD app that was released on 24 February has been downloaded more than 10,000 times.

Braille coded Electoral Identity Cards distributed in East Delhi for 276 blind voters

The disabled-friend voter IDs were distributed as part of an initiative of the East district’s parliamentary constituency. Returning Officer for the district, K. Mahesh said that there were 6,218 disabled voters in East Delhi among whom 276 were blind, to whom specially designed IDs were distributed. Mr. Mahesh said that the initiative was to help ensure accessible elections, keeping in line with the Election Commission’s theme of “No Voter to be Left Behind.” In order to help voters with disabilities cast their vote, various facilities are being made available at polling stations including Braille signage on the ballot unit of EVM, construction of ramps, provisions for wheel chairs at all polling stations, trained volunteers, pick-up and drop facilities among others, the Returning Officer said. The voters were also given a specially designed alarm clock and a ‘signature guard’ along with the braille coded electoral photo identity card. Avni Kumar, “People with Disabilities’ youth icon for the East district was also present.
**Officers forgo last rites of parents as Election Duty calls**

As Arunachal votes on 11 April to choose their parliamentary and legislative assembly representatives, extraordinary dedication by those at the helms of affairs has come to the fore. Thiya Devraj Singh is the District Informatics Officer (DIO), NIC, posted in East Siang HQ Pasighat and SS Chowdhury is the ADC of Jairampur in Changlang district, and in charge of the Nampong assembly constituency. Devraj lost his father on 5 April, while Chowdhury lost his mother on 31 March. Devraj did not go back to BishnupurThingamLeikai in Manipur for his father’s last rites, and Chowdhury did not go to Kolkata for his mother’s cremation. This all because there is a call of duty that they could not for sake. “At a time when many of us are seeking silly excuses to avoid election duties, I am really proud to have a colleague officer like Devraj, who has decided to stay back, considering the enormous responsibilities he has on his shoulder for successful conduct of the simultaneous elections,” said East Siang HQ Electoral Registration Officer Sibo Pasing. “Without him, we can’t imagine functioning of the district election office at this hour as the DIO is the one managing ERONET, SUVIDHA, C VIGIL, ELECON, EMS, and many more IT-related issues of election,” said Pasing. CEO Kaling Tayeng said, “The election family, from the EC down to the DEOs concerned, commends the selfless sacrifice and priority given to the call of duty. There are no words to describe the sacrifice of the officers.”

---

**Army troops deployed in Siachen, LoC cast their Votes**

Indian Army troops deployed across the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir and Siachen fulfilled their duty of being responsible citizens by voting in the Lok Sabha Elections 2019. In a first, the Election Commission of India (ECI) had provided the facility to serving troops, deployed in remote terrains, to download their ballot papers online, vote and forward those to their respective Electoral Returning Officers via post. Undeterred by cross-border ceasefire violations and severe weather conditions, soldiers of the Indian Army voted enthusiastically on Thursday in the Lok Sabha Elections 2019 exhibiting the strength of the democratic process.
**The Indian Express**

**When donkeys carried EVMs to remote Polling Booths in Tamil Nadu**

While GPS-fitted vehicles are deployed to transport poll materials like EVMs in the state, such technology or vehicles do not always help; especially when it comes to hilly terrains of Tamil Nadu to send across election paraphernalia. Particularly, where there are no roads to reach hamlets on hilltops -leave alone motorable ones- the challenge is more pronounced and carrying EVMs, and control units within the stipulated time frame are no mean task. A slew of such remote villages is spread across Tamil Nadu including those atop hills in the districts of Dharmapur, Dindigul, Erode, Namakkal, and Theni with voters ranging between 300 and 1,100 in a given polling station. Several booths in remote locations like Kottur in the Ponnagaram region of Dharmapur and hamlets on Bothamalai in Namakkal pose the challenge of rocky terrain too. To surmount the challenge, poll officials loaded election materials -neatly packed in gunny bags- on donkeys and ponies and they carried some of the luggage on their heads to reach the designated polling stations and the arduous journey was in the range of 9 to 11 kilometres on the hills. Vellakkavi and Pallathukadu in the Kodaikanal hill ranges (Dindigul), Kathiriampatti (Erode) and Kedamalai (Namakkal) were among the hilly villages officials reached overcoming the challenges with the help of donkeys and ponies.

**The Washington Post**

**Election workers in India travelled 300 miles over 4 days to set up a Polling Booth — for one voter**

Election workers in India traveled 300 miles over 4 days to set up a Polling Booth — for one voter. In the fading afternoon light, Gammar Bam glanced down nervously at a fast-flowing river in a corner of northeastern India. His team had already driven eight hours on one-lane mountainous roads and shaggy bridges. Now they were trekking on a slippery path hugging a cliff. Bam looked at the narrow track and tried to gauge if he could clamber over an uprooted tree while carrying a voting machine. Somehow, he would have to make it work. For Bam and his team of polling officers, that meant a four-day journey of over 300 miles — to ensure a single voter in a remote border state could cast her vote. “There is both excitement and nervousness,” said Rupak Tamang, one of the team members, as he set up the voting machine. “If the one voter turns up, there will be 100 percent voting, but if she doesn’t, then it will be zero percent.” In the western state of Gujarat, a team will cross a lion infested jungle to find a single voter. In the region of Ladakh, high in the Himalayan mountains, teams will be airlifted before trekking for one day with oxygen cylinders to reach voters. Far off the country’s east coast, on the remote Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the teams braved crocodile swamps for nine voters. The lengths to which India goes to reach voters is a reflection of its commitment to universal franchise.

**Scroll.in**

**What does it take to get 900 million Voters to Electronic Voting Machines in 10,35,918 Polling Stations across India in under 3 months?**

Nearly five million polling personnel and police forces, according to the Election Commission of India’s 2016 annual report. In the 2014 general election, the staff deployed in polling booths alone numbered 37,31,897, not counting the vast numbers of security and other personnel. The Election Commission of India, however, has merely 400 officials, the report states. Each of its state-level representatives, the Chief Electoral Officers, have a few more employees in their offices. So, where do the rest of the polling staff come from? The majority of polling personnel are temporary staff recruited from virtually every branch of government. They comprise teachers, engineers, clerks, accountants, administrative and support staff from across departments including government laboratories and hospitals, security and police personnel, bus drivers, railway staff, Anganwadi workers responsible for early childhood care as well as primary healthcare workers. For the period of the Lok Sabha elections — which typically last between 45 days and 90 days – these government employees are unthethered from their regular posts and deputed to the Election Commission to ensure no voter is left behind.
Show Inked Finger, get a Reward

In order to ensure a good turnout, industries, apartment complexes and even hotels in West Bengal have announced incentives for those who vote. Several garment factories and other industries in Peenya Industrial Area have promised a surprise gift for those who show proof that they have voted. Lake Verandah, a large apartment complex off Bannerghatta Road, has announced a lucky draw for residents who vote with the promise of interesting prizes. Nisarga, a hotel on Nrupatunga Road, says there will be discounts for customers who show their inked fingers on Thursday. Several other hotels in the city have similar initiatives. Many private schools are offering extra marks. D. Shashtri Kumar, general secretary of the Associated Management of Primary and Secondary Schools in Karnataka, said students of many private schools will be given four marks if both parents cast their vote. These marks will be added to their projects.

The New York Times
What it takes to pull off India’s Gargantuan Election

More than 900 million people — over 10 percent of the world’s population — head to the polls over several weeks and the Election Commission of India is committed to polling every voter, no matter how isolated. Democracy doesn’t get much simpler than one person, one vote. But what happens when that one person is a hermit living alone in a jungle temple surrounded by lions, leopards and cobras, miles from the nearest town? In India, the election comes to him. Bharatadas Darshandas, the lone inhabitant and caretaker of a Hindu temple deep in the Gir Forest, has become a symbol of India’s Herculean effort to ensure that the votes of every one of its 900 million eligible voters are counted. It is a feat of gargantuan proportions, requiring 12 million polling officials and cutting-edge technology. But just getting to the voters — some of whom live among the world’s tallest mountains, its densest jungles and sweltering deserts — presents its own set of challenges. Among those remote locales is the country’s highest polling place — 15,256 feet above sea level — found in a village in the Spiti Valley of the Himalayas, where just 48 voters live.

The Indian EXPRESS
Schools Get into Election groove:
Discounts for parents who vote, rap songs
by school children

The excitement of the election season has charged up school students, who in spite of being ineligible to vote, conducted awareness campaigns, composed rap songs and organised demonstrations to educate people on the importance of voting in the city. Apart from students, many city schools too have taken steps such as carrying out “appointee elections” and offered discounts to parents who have voted during the admission process. Hriday Tulsi, 17, has visited nearly 17 civic schools in his quest to educate school children on the importance of voting. Wanting to spread the teachings passed on by his parents some years ago, Tulsi began the initiative called ‘Vote India’ in a bid to help increase voter turnout in the city. “I had interactive sessions with students from Classes 5 to 9. Even if these students are not yet eligible to vote, the knowledge will equip them for future, and at the same time, they can pass on the message to their parents. Most children are unaware about the concept of democracy. I tell them what a constituency is, how the election process works, including why it is important to vote,” he says.
Journey of Indian Elections since Independence

Indian Democratic Polity: Experience of Last 70 Years of Elections

S. D. Sharma
Senior Fellow, ECI

India, the world’s largest democracy by electorate with 910 million electors, was established with independence in 1947. It happens to be the largest democracy with a vibrant and a rich culture of participation marked by faith of the Indian People in electoral process that is characterised by non-partisan nature and the basic tenet of ‘No Voter to be Left Behind.’--- a perfect intent for inclusion of all categories of voters.

The Constitution proclaims India as a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic. The sine qua non for a true democracy is the holding of free and fair elections for returning the representatives of people to the legislative bodies. Per se the strength of a democracy lies in the premise that elections are conducted at regular periodic intervals and directed in a completely non-partisan, free and fair manner and that the party in power is under no circumstances, able to influence the electoral institutions or the process.

Election Commission of India (ECI), the constitutional institution at the centre of entire electoral process, has successfully conducted inter alia, seventeen General Elections to the ‘Lok Sabha’, the House of People or the Lower House of the Parliament during the last seven decades in a free, fair and credible manner. Indian polity has moved on its path of democratic consolidation through vibrant electoral participation for seven decades.

Issues and Challenges

Election in world’s largest democracy has its own challenges in terms of sheer scale, size, diversity and complexity besides logistics for men, materials and the process management. The Commission has effectively addressed the challenges as a matter of pride and honor with demonstration of professionalism, commitment, stakeholder consultation, strategic interventions, integration of state-of-the-art technologies and meticulous planning down to the polling station level.

In the process we have evolved and brought in place a comprehensive, efficient and effective framework for smooth and timely delivery of free, fair and credible elections in line with commitment to fulfill the constitutional mandate, legislative obligation, institutional values and democratic traditions established since independence.

The Foundation

The Founding Fathers of the Nation laid a very strong...
foundation for a robust electoral system embedded inter alia in Part XV Elections of our Constitution. The provisions in this ‘Part’ constitute a complete code in itself and inter alia include an independent Election Commission, Universal and equal adult suffrage, maintenance of electoral rolls, a robust system of dispute resolution in electoral matters and as such all the essentials ingredients for conduct of free and fair elections. This strong foundation has helped our democracy to sustain, grow and shape up as the largest and one of the most stable democracies of the world and our election system as ‘Gold Standard’.

The Constitutional Framework
Constitutional provisions Support the Robust Electoral System

The Constitution under ‘Part XV Elections’ comprising Article 324 to 329 contains the core prescription and the overarching framework for Elections and related institutional mechanism to support free and fair electoral process in the country. Briefly speaking, Article 324 provides for the Election Commission of India, its mandate, powers and functions; maintenance of the Electoral Roll, superintendence, direction and control of elections to the Parliament, State Legislatures and the Offices of the President and the Vice-President. Article 325 provides that no person shall be ineligible for inclusion in the electoral roll on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or anyone of these. Article 326 provides for the Universal Adult Suffrage to be the basis of elections. Article 327 empowers the Parliament to make laws in connection with elections, delimitation and all matters necessary for securing the due constitution of Houses. Article 328 empowers the State Legislatures to legislate on elections to their own Houses of the Legislature subject to the provisions of the Constitution and the Parliamentary Legislation. Article 329 provides for bar to the interference by courts in electoral matters; and the proper manner of dispute resolution by way of filing election petition before a court of competent jurisdiction. While the core of ‘Elections’ lies in Part XV of the Constitution, there are several other provisions in the Constitution closely linked to elections.

Need for early elections after independence was a matter of importance for Founding Fathers of the Nation. The provisions of the Constitution relating to Citizenship, provisional Parliament, Interim President and Article 324 on Election Commission were brought into force on November 26, 1949 while rest of the Constitution came into force on 26th Jan., 1950.

The Legislative Framework

Read with Article 246 of the Constitution, Entry 72 List I in Schedule 7 to the Constitution empowers the Parliament to legislate on aforesaid elections. Entry 37 of List II empowers the State Legislatures to legislate subject to provisions of any law made by the Parliament in the matter.

In exercise of the powers conferred under the Constitution, the Parliament enacted two main legislations, namely - The Representation of the People Act, 1950 and The Representation of the People Act 1951. While the RP Act 1950 guides the basic requisites for elections including delimitation, allocation of seats and preparation of Electoral Rolls; the RP Act 1951 provides for the actual conduct of elections in India including the rules of registration of political parties; electoral dispute resolution mechanisms, etc. While the principal enactments as aforesaid continue to constitute the basic legislative framework for elections in the country, the experience and the emerging challenges have been addressed through amendments from time to time to the above enactments, some additional legislative instruments and subordinate legislation. The legislations are further fortified by the provisions under the Indian Penal Code especially in Chapter IX A ‘Of Offences Relating to Elections in Section 171A to 171 I’.
ECI Direction and Guidelines

The ECI has issued a series of directions, instructions and guidelines from time to time for conduct of free and fair elections in discharge of its constitutional obligation. These directions, instructions and guidelines are well documented in ECI Manuals and Handbooks etc and have to be observed and followed strictly by all the election officials and other personnel at work at different levels and other stakeholders in a sacrosanct manner.

Supreme Court Judgments

Supreme Court judgments lay down law that provides comprehensive guidance on many aspects of elections and related matters. Controversies, if any relating to electoral matters have been set at rest under judicial pronouncements made from time to time. The judgments express settled position of law and are binding in nature as such in view of Article 141 and 144 of the Constitution.

The Election Commission of India

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is a permanent constitutional body, independent of the Government and functions in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and the law relating to elections. In the matters not covered by the above, Provisions of Article 324 act as a vast reservoir of plenary power at the disposal of the Election Commission to empower it to handle emerging challenges and unforeseen situations to fulfill its mandate and to enable it to discharge its responsibility for conduct of free and fair elections.

The Election Commission of India was established on January 25, 1950, a day before India became a Republic. The nucleus staff of the Commission was essentially drawn from the Secretariat of the Constituent Assembly. The first Chief Election Commissioner assumed charge on March 21, 1950. Since its inception, ECI has been meticulously, smoothly, efficiently and effectively managing the preparation of the electoral rolls and entire election process - planning, preparing, conducting, counting and declaring results – from first General Election to the first Lok Sabha in 1951-52 to the 17th Lok Sabha in 2019, besides more than 374 State Assembly Elections; and the elections to the Offices of the President, the Vice-President of India and the Rajya Sabha (Council of States).

The Changes in Structure with Passage of Time

As per Article 324 of the Constitution, the Election Commission comprises the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners as the President may fix from time to time. The appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and the Election Commissioners by the President is stipulated to be subject to law made by the Parliament, though no such law has been enacted till date. Article 324(2) provides for other members of the Commission, but until October, 1989 the Election Commission remained a single member body. Two Commissioners were appointed to the Election Commission in Oct., 1989. However, their appointments were rescinded with effect from January 1, 1990 and the Commission reverted back to status quo ante, that is, the single member Commission. Litigation in the Apex Court in the matter did not bring any dividends to the Petitioners. However, the observations of the Supreme Court possibly led to bringing in of the legislation passed as the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners (Conditions of Service) Act, 1991. By October, 1993, the President had fixed the number of the Election Commissioners to two and the two Commissioners were also appointed on October 7, 1993. As consequence, the ECI again became a multimember body and remains so till date. In fact the Commission, while expressing its views on electoral reforms to Government of India in July 1998, expressed satisfaction with the present set up of CEC.
and two ECs and reiterated the views in July 2004.

Article 326 of the Constitution
‘The elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assembly of every State shall be on the basis of adult suffrage; that is to say, every person who is a citizen of India and who is not less than eighteen years of age on such date as may be fixed in that behalf by or under any law made by the appropriate Legislature and is not otherwise disqualified under this Constitution or any law made by the appropriate Legislature’.

Universal Adult Suffrage
Rise of the Republic brought the gift of universal adult suffrage to all the Indian citizens. Whereas, in other countries people struggled for long many years to attain this right, the Framers of the Constitution presented this much cherished gift of democratic participation in the form of uniform adult suffrage embedded in the constitution of India. Accordingly, every citizen of India, who is not less than eighteen years of age except those who are mentally unsound or who have been declared ineligible otherwise, has the right to vote. Suffrage at 21 originally, was reduced to 18 with effect from April 1, 1989 through a Constitutional Amendment under Sixty-first Amendment Act, 1988. Such qualifying for determination of 18 years age is First January of the Year in which the roll is revised.

The Nature of Electorate
Under the Government of India Act, 1935 the electorate was honeycombed with different kinds of voters with reserved seats. Separate communal electorates had plagued the Indian politics since their introduction in 1909. The Framers of the Indian Constitution would have none of them. Article 325 states that no person shall be ineligible for inclusion in or to claim to be included in a special electoral roll on the grounds of religion, race, caste, or sex.

The First General Election
The need for early elections after independence was a matter of importance for Founding Fathers of the Nation. The Constituent Assembly served as the interim legislature to facilitate inter alia a smooth election to the first House of People or the Lok Sabha and the State Legislatures.

First General Elections were conducted by ECI in 1951-52 for 489 seats to the House of the People (The Lok Sabha) and about 3,283 seats of different State Assemblies. These elections were held under the First-Post-The-Post (FPTP) System. Allocation of seats to various States in the Lok Sabha and in the State Assemblies was made by Parliament and determination of territorial extent of Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies was made by the President on the recommendations of the ECI. This first General Election of 1951-52 was a milestone in laying a strong foundation of democracy in independent India.

‘An Act of Abundant Faith’
The decision of the Constituent Assembly to give every Indian, the right to vote under a system of universal and direct suffrage, was, as Alladi Krishnaswamy Ayyar described it, an act of “abundant faith” in the common man and the ultimate success of the democratic rule.

Embedded in Article 325 and 326 of the Constitution, the message of universal and equal adult suffrage was loud and clear and it constitutes the very base of the Indian electoral exercise.
The motion for preparation of electoral rolls was adopted on January 8, 1949. The Representation of People Act was passed on April 20, 1950. As per provisions of the Act all persons who were not less than 21 years of age as on March 1, 1950 and who had resided in a constituency for not less than 180 days during the period April 1, 1947 to December 31, 1949 were entitled for registration as voters.

The Representation of People Act, 1951 was enacted on July 17, 1951 and this facilitated the task of organizing the election process. Issue of Scheduled Castes Order on August 10, 1950, the Scheduled Tribes Order on September 6, 1950 as also the order regarding the delimitation of the Constituencies by mid November, 1950 were important milestones in holding of 1st General elections in the country. With over 176 million citizens constituting the electorate, the exercise of their registration as electors, logistics for the electoral participation presented a challenge both, complex and gigantic for a young Republic and a young Election Commission. The ECI addressed the multifarious emerging challenges and complex issues with a sense of confidence and high grade professionalism.

Registration of voters came as a major challenge resulting from barriers arising out of the linguistic complexities, the problems of diverse traditions about surnames, the religious inhibitions among the women to communicate the names of their husband and the ambiguous citizenship status of the large migrant population of refugees. The work regarding preparation of electoral roll was started, much earlier as a matter of abundant caution under the instructions and the guidance of the Constituent Assembly with the intent of holding elections as early as possible. Polling was held between October 25, 1951 and February 21, 1952. Although the majority of votes were cast in February 1952, voters in the state of Himachal Pradesh were given the chance to vote in October 1951 because the heavy snowfall, primitive roads, and mountainous terrain of that state made it likely that polling stations would be largely unreachable during a February election. The very first votes of the election were cast in the tehsil (district) of Chini in Himachal Pradesh. Despite difficult climatic and geophysical conditions, the electors braved both the weather and distance. They came to the polling stations, attired in gala dresses, men and women, on foot, by public conveyance, and by almost every conceivable means of transportation and took their responsibilities towards democracy seriously.

**Use of Symbols: An innovation in First General Elections**

Normally, a ballot paper with the names of contesting candidates and a voter recording his vote by placing a mark against his choice would suffice. A poor level of literacy, as low as 16.6%, was one of the major challenges. After examining various options from all aspects carefully, the Commission decided in favor of symbol system, i.e., election symbols representing commonly known objects. As per this...
system, ballot boxes, each bearing the distinctive symbol of a candidate, were placed in the polling compartment.

No mark was necessary to be made on the pre-printed ballot paper to cast votes. It had to be put simply in the box carrying the symbol of the candidate of his choice. This helped preserve the secrecy of the vote as well as enabled illiterate voters to vote as per their choice. Samples of the ballot papers make an interesting visual experience in comparison to what we have today.

Though the purpose which necessitated the origin of symbols was an innovation for a limited yet vast challenge, with the passage of time, symbol system has become an integral part of the electoral system. Symbol has proved to be an invaluable device not only for casting votes; it has become an important feature of campaigns. Later, the Commission promulgated Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order in the year 1968 thereby codifying the process.

**Some Important Statistics**

The Election Commission set up 1,32,560 polling stations with 1,96,084 polling booths to cater to 176 million electors and deployed some two and a half million ballot boxes. About one million Government officials were deputed to supervise the actual voting. A total of 180 tons of paper was used for 600 million ballot papers at a cost of Rs one million (Rs 10, 77, 401-13-0). A total number of 3, 89,816 phials of indelible ink were used at a cost of Rs 2, 27,460. The magnitude of election operation was not the only challenge; physical movement presented a larger challenge full of exacting difficulties especially in the remote areas. Elephants, bullock carts, camels were used for transport in difficult tracts. The turnout of the voters was impressive, except in a few parts of the country. 45.67% percent electors actually voted. Bearing in mind high rate of illiteracy, the turnout must be regarded as a remarkably high proportion, particularly when vast majority of voters did not have any previous experience of voting.

**102-Year-Old Who Voted at Independent India’s 1st Polls Votes in Himachal General Elections, 2019**

Shyam Saran Negi, a 102-year-old voter who also participated in the country’s first general elections in 1951, voted today
in a picturesque hamlet in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh. “I have never missed an opportunity to vote,” Mr Negi told reporters in Kalpa, some 275 km from the state capital, Shimla. A staunch believer in democracy, the 102-year-old never fails to cast his vote in any of the elections, be it Lok Sabha elections, Assembly polls or the Panchayat elections. In 1951, Shyam Negi, a retired school teacher, was on an election duty and exercised his franchise in Chini constituency - later renamed Kinnaur. At that time, polling in the snow-bound areas of the hill state was held ahead of other places in the country. This time, he casts his vote for the 31st time. He has voted in 17 parliamentary elections and 14 assembly polls.

M Sudha Devi an IAS officer who was posted as Kinnaur Deputy Commissioner, later on, met Negi who was quite well known among village people at Kalpa. Negi laid out the details as for how he was the first voter of India and until now has never failed to cast his vote. The Election Commission carried out the voting process in advance in Kinnaur district as the place is known for harsh winter and snowfall. The first general elections took place between October 25, 1951 to February 21, 1952. Most of the Indians voted in February 1952. But voters from Himachal Pradesh were given the chance to vote in October 1951 because more often primitive roads and mountainous terrains used to get blocked by heavy snowfall during the winter season in those days. It could have made reaching to polling stations difficult during February. At that time Shyam Saran Negi worked as a teacher in government school.

First General Elections Conclude

It was the world’s largest electoral exercise in democracy. Western observers looked at it with disbelief and awe. They wondered how this gigantic experiment would succeed in a new democracy facing challenges of massive migration, low literacy rate, tradition-bound, unaccustomed to franchise and unfamiliar with the ways and tenets of democracy with an under developed economy. Thus, the Indian elector redeemed the “Act of faith” the Founding Fathers had reposed in them. The first general election to the House of People and the State Legislative Assemblies ushered in Democracy and the Rule of Law. The unqualified success of the first general elections and the satisfaction they brought to the country at large and the polity in particular were a pleasant surprise. The adventure and the experience was acknowledged, both at home and abroad, as a remarkable act of faith in democracy, nobly conceived and efficiently implemented.

To Be Continued..
A queue of voters waiting to cast their vote in Delhi, 1952

A woman showing her ID, ready to cast her vote in Delhi, 1952
The Story of Team Zara

On the evening of April 22, 2019, on receipt of instructions from Superintendent of Police, Kara-Dadi district, I left Palin in the midnight hours for Koloriang in Kurung Kumey district to avail a helicopter service to a remote outpost the next morning. Having been recently posted for election duty, I was new to both Palin and Koloriang. Without any time for preparation or drawing up plans for the task, I was at Koloriang the next morning and I was given the list of security personnel who were detailed for the Fresh Poll to be conducted at Zara Polling station on April 27, 2019 with me as the Security Officer of the election team for the fresh poll.

Zara Polling Station is under Pipsorang Circle, of Kara-Dadi district which is one of the most remote places of India. It took two sorties to airlift our team including the election officials to Pipsorang, the last outpost with a helipad. It was only after landing there that we got to acquaint ourselves with rest of the election officials and got our polling teams consisting of 42 members including myself.

“We scaled many big mountains and dense jungles, which took us about 9 hours of climbing and 6 hours of descending.”
After halting at Pipsorang for a day we left for Zara Polling Station. Zara polling station is the farthest polling station of Kara Dadi District from its district headquarter, Palin. As the road from Pipsorang to Zara is a hilly track, we started early on the morning of April 25 and it took us almost 9 gruelling hours on foot to reach our destination. The route was hilly and the jungle dense - we even had to scale three big mountains to reach our destination. Somehow, our polling team could complete the journey safe and sound.

With earnest preparation and long discussion with Goon Buras and members of different political parties at Zarato maintain peace, we managed to successfully conduct the fresh poll at Zara Polling Station on April 27, 2019 and having done our job were set to head back to Pipsorang the next day.

This is where our tale of woes began:

We were waiting for retrieval by helicopter at Pipsorang but the incessant rainfall continued to prevent this. We were hoping and expecting good weather but to our dismay, every single day, the Rain Gods kept pouring water on our hopes. Pipsorang has bare minimum basic amenities, no road, no shops, and money doesn’t count there due to absence of items that could be purchased. One Pepsi bottle costs Rs 500 and salt Rs 250! Besides these few items brought on head load by the locals, there are no other day our stocks were running out and in fact morale of the forces and polling teams were starting to deteriorate with each passing day. It was very tough for me to maintain the morale of security personnel under such testing condition. Our daily food consisted of plain boiled leafy vegetables that too without any additional ingredient - salt and pepper.

Our main problem was that as it was raining continuously we couldn’t use the Tafli and Parsi Parlo foot tracks since we had received word that security threats were very high on those routes. It was learned from sources that some section of parties had laid ambush plan upon us to snatch our polled EVMs. Day by day, 7 to 8 hanging bridges were cut down by miscreants in order to block our routes in all alternate foot tracks.

As we were stranded there for more than 20 days and there was no sign of showing dry weather, we took the risky decision to move out of Pipsorang via Daporijo of Upper Subansiri district, a route which is seldomly used even by the locals.
On May 16, 2019 after 24 days in Pipsorang, we started our journey back by foot. Our plan was to cover the entire distance in 3 days. On day 1, we had to halt at Hania village, on day 2 at Rikhung village and on day 3 we were to reach Daponio via Jikke village. And we finally did it!

It was one of the toughest journeys of my life. We scaled many big mountains, which took us 9 hrs approximately in climbing and 6 hrs in descending. It was full of dense jungles and from the mountain peaks, we could even see the clouds below us. Locals say that even helicopters could not reach those peaks. We scaled 8 such mountains on our way back. In this treacherous journey, we cried inside our hearts for if something happened no one was there to help us. And above all, the rain kept pouring on making our track more muddy and slippery. It seemed, even the Mithun (Semi-domesticated animal) and wild animals didn’t roam around in those areas. At the beginning of our return journey itself, one WT operator surrendered and returned back to Pipsorang. Besides inclement weather, big leaches were another problem. When we took off our shoes, we would find minimum 20 big leaches clinging to our feet. We were also bitten by fly insects called ‘Damdum’ and came across many snakes and scorpions on the way. We used local porters to carry our luggage and food was half cooked as people were large in number. From starting our journey from early morning at 03:00 am and reaching our destination at midnight - we used to walk
for more than 20 hrs a day. Although my knees were injured, yet in order maintain spirit of team, I used two lathis and kept on walking. We drank water from running streams and once when we were running out of water, we collected rain water which was dripping from banana leaves.

Somehow, facing all these adversities, we finally managed to reach Jikke village of Upper Subansiri District on May 18, 2019. It was a great sigh of relief seeing our colleagues who had come there to receive us. Finally, we reached Daporijo on vehicle and safely escorted the polled EVMs into intermediary strong Room at Ziro, Lower Subansiri district successfully conducting our duty and completing our mission.

- Tashi Darang
Dy SP. SDPO Miao, Changlang
‘Ekorpora Egharo’

An innovative programme of Sivasagar Election district, Assam at the initiative of the Deputy Commissioner cum DEO, Dr. S. Lakshmanan, named ‘Ekorpora Egharo’ (1 to 11) was formally launched on April 1, 2019, under which it was decided to focus on low voter turnout areas in the previous Lok Sabha Election of 2014 and engage young voters/students of educational institutions in these areas to motivate their community members to vote, thereby ensuring larger participation of them in Lok Sabha Election 2019.

With an aim to harness the huge potential of the youth in creating electoral awareness in the community by meaningful association of them and ensure larger participation of the community in the suffrage, this initiative was adopted by Sivasagar Election District. 18 high schools and higher secondary schools were identified under the new scheme and publicity materials for ‘Ekorpora Egharo’ were distributed among them on the day of launch. Quiz, puzzles, fun games, competitions such as poster making, wall magazine, essay and story writing were arranged on campuses to sensitize the young voters about the electoral process.

Coincidentally, the launch of the programme on April 1, with the target date of April 11 (election day) also bore significance of ‘1 to 11’. The students of these schools carried out a massive campaign about compulsory and ethical voting in their respective localities by taking out processions with placards and official posters, street corner meetings, campaign at marketplaces, door to door campaign etc.

A short video film on the occasion was also released which was particularly shown in school assemblies for motivating the ‘Ambassadors of Democracy’ to carry out the job at hand and this initiative went a long way in ensuring larger electoral participation in the district.

- Office of CEO (Assam)
Ambassadors of Democracy spreading electoral awareness in the community

THE STUDENTS OF THOSE SCHOOLS AS ‘AMBASSADORS OF DEMOCRACY’ TOOK A PLEDGE TO BRING AT LEAST 10 VOTERS EACH ON POLLING DAY, THEREBY EFFECTIVELY MAKING IT ‘1 TO 11’ OR ‘EKORPOR A EGAHRO’.
WoWing The Voters

WoW was a state-of-the-art, multi utility, high end audio visually equipped technocratic mobile van. It was a one of a kind project to provide Social Education for three months. The WoW bus moved across Rajkot District with different themes and participants every day with music, special election videos, appeal of state icons, songs, dance, attractive decorations, colourful fancy big balloons and festive lights. The bus would stop at popular public places, residential societies, shopping malls and all other prominent spots.

The PwD Voters

A young differently abled artist played musical instruments and entertained a bus full of PwD Voters which was followed by a sumptuous dinner.

The Senior Citizens

The senior citizens too were not far behind when it came to enthusiasm. They sang songs and appealed to the young to cast their votes while appreciating District Administration’s efforts for providing facilities & amenities to them.

The Chitranagari Artists

This was a collaboration of painters with more than 200 skilled and zealous artists whose forte was wall paintings on social subjects. These artists were inducted in WoW SVEEP Van in various areas of the city where they painted voting slogans, SVEEP signature wall where spectators joined to try a hand at SVEEP paintings too.

The SVEEP Dramatics on the Wheels

Artists and students of Dholakiya School performed SVEEP Street Plays and their special drama performance and wowed people on the street with their fantastic acting skills.
The SVEEP Van was flagged off and inaugurated by First Time Female Voters group.

Popular radio channel, Red FM held a SVEEP competition especially for First Time Female Voters where winners had a chance to have dinner date with a popular RJ. These young and happy group of women got the lucky first ride of WoW in their fancy attires making for a cheerful start to SVEEP Mobile journey. These ladies cherished this experience expressing gratitude for District Administration and said each first major achievement of life is memorable but, being a first time Voter is auspicious.

- Office of CEO (Gujarat)
Himachal Pradesh takes pride in having the highest Polling Station - Tashigang in the district of Lahaul and Spiti situated at a height of 15,256 feet above sea level. Until last year, the Election Department of Himachal Pradesh was using a primary school in the neighbouring village of Gette as a Polling Station for the two villages. But as heavy snowfall rendered it inaccessible, election officials turned towards the two-storey Tourist Reception Centre at Tashigang since public infrastructure is hard to come by in this region. Despite the many logistical challenges, this polling station was setup for just 49 voters. The efforts here also bore fruitful results when all these 49 voters turned up to vote dressed up in traditional attire to celebrate the festival of democracy!

- Office of CEO (Himachal Pradesh)
Vote Simdega Vote

‘Moy Heko Simdega’ which translates to ‘I am Simdega’ was a campaign designed by SVEEP Cell Simdega in order to reach each and every household of the district with the message of unity, importance of individuality and the whole district as one family with priority given to Female and PwD voters.

MATDAAN MITRA

To drive the campaign we selected a team who were called ‘Matdaan Mitra’. Our target was to reach all the households through 571 polling booths and 965 Anganwadis with the help of Matdaan Mitras. The team consisted of Block Development Officers, Dedicated Teachers, Multi-Purpose Workers, CDPOs and Lady Supervisors.

THE MEGA CAMPAIGN

Through the campaign, all the teachers got involved with their respective Booth Level Officers (BLOs) and conducted various programmes to motivate the voters. All the booths had to verify Assured Minimum Facilities (AMF), thus all the 571 schools that were selected as polling booths ensured drinking water facility, functional toilets and electricity. This campaign allowed us to directly engage with teachers and understand their day to day challenges.

Chunav Pathshaalas were conducted on Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Days (VHSNDs) at every Anganwadi in convergence of MPWs, Lady Supervisors and Anganwadi Sevikas. The DSWO had issued a letter to all the CDPOs to track the same. This intervention helped us in ensuring 100% VHSNDs even in the rush created due to elections.

A theme song was made for the campaign in local dialect to ensure maximum participation. Jharkhand is famous for conducting Akharas in villages, where villagers sing and dance together while discussing day to day issues and finding solutions of the same. Through JSLPS we conducted Akharas, where villagers participated and the Simdega anthem went viral in the district while connecting them all.

- Office of CEO (Jharkhand)
PwDs register high voter turnout in Hassan

Persons with Disabilities registered an impressive turnout of 95.37% in Lok Sabha 2019 polls in Hassan District. Irrespective of difficulties, they managed to reach the polling stations and cast their votes, thanks to the facilities provided by the Election Commission of India. With 7,874 men and 5,022 women, a total of 12,796 PwDs registered as voters in the district as many as 12,300 cast their votes. Braving the scorching sun, they reached the booths to repose their faith in election process, an integral part of the democratic system.

The Election Commission had provided wheel chairs, ramps to facilitate their movement. For the first time, student volunteers were involved in the process. These arrangements were very well received by the PwD community and many have lauded ECI’s initiatives to ensure hassle free facilitation of PwDs.

A lot of credit goes to the efforts of ‘Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation’ (SVEEP) division for encouraging and providing amenities to voters to exercise their franchise. The district administration had made elaborate arrangements for Persons with Disabilities at polling stations. They provided tricycles and made special arrangements for hearing impaired at the polling stations. The SVEEP committee had also organized various programmes including street plays and mock voting to educate voters.
Tribal women reach booths in traditional attire

“We are celebrating the polling day as a day of the festivals,” said Kanchan and Enchin, the tribal women who turned up at an ethnic polling booth at Angadighalli of Belur Taluk to cast their vote on April 18, 2019. It was indeed a sight to see tribal people standing in a queue donning traditional tribal attire to exercise their franchise.

Kanchan said this is the right opportunity to display their traditional dress as the district administration had set up ethnic polling stations to attract tribal families. “We celebrate different festivals wearing traditional costumes. Voting is our fundamental right we must not miss this opportunity to participate in this Festival of Democracy, Desh Ka Maha Tyohar,” she added.

Enchin from Angadighalli district said that one must choose a candidate who is committed for the development and protection of the nation besides having concern for poor. The duo hail from the semi-nomadic Hakki Pikki tribe. Over 320 tribal families have been residing in the Belur Taluk region of Karnataka since the past two decades.

- Office of CEO (Karnataka)
KERALA

CONDUCTING A GREEN ELECTION

For the first time in its history, Kerala held a Clean and Green Election in 2019. Early in March, the Kerala high court banned the use of flex and nonbiodegradable materials during electioneering. An advisory was issued by the CEO immediately after asking all political parties to refrain from using single-use plastic materials in poll campaigning, and advising them to opt for eco-friendly options, prompting them to consider wall graffiti and paper posters as viable alternatives. The collaboration of Kerala Suchitwa Mission was sought for, accordingly by doing the handholding this joint venture was carried out successfully in the whole state. Along with the district administration in Thiruvananthapuram, the Haritha Keralam Mission and the Suchitwa Mission - two government bodies looking at waste management, took steps to ensure a green election.

The primary focus was to prevent the use of plastic and choosing reusable alternatives like glass/stainless steel/porcelain cutlery. It was made it clear that banners and hoardings made of plastic material should be avoided and can be replaced by banners and hoardings made using paper and cotton cloth. Candidates were advised to try and avoid the use of plastic drinking water bottles during their campaigning and to use only eco-friendly items such as cloth and paper materials to decorate their campaign vehicles. The candidates and party workers were requested to hire steel plates and glasses for meals while campaigning. Polling stations, counting centres, and other election offices had also been directed to avoid plastic material, including water bottles and almost all districts created a green model polling booth which was useful in spreading awareness amongst the public of the efforts taken up. A booklet was published explaining all the ways in which the green protocol can be adhered to and enforced in the state. Not just that, all activities conducted by the Commission at the State level and even at the District level were entirely ‘green’ events and promoted the plastic free message. Special events were organized by the district election officials to promote the green message including cycle rallies, processions by students and green protocol volunteers in different districts, signature campaign on cloth banners, street play on green election, flash mobs, beach run, sand art, quizzes, celebrity endorsements...
and messages from district SVEEP icons to adhere to green protocol etc., all under the aegis of SVEEP activities in the state.

Students from Election Literacy Clubs (ELCs) created handmade paper pens and paper bags which were used to distribute polling materials to officials on

The Initiative was carried out in collaboration with Haritha Kerala Mission and the Suchitwa Mission
polling day in various locations especially in Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha. Similarly, at many Collectorate in the districts, the candidates were welcomed with green materials when they came to file their nominations. The public was also encouraged to come up and report any violations that was noticed anywhere in the state for immediate action from authorities. As part of the green protocol, more than 17 lakh flex boards, banners, posters and stickers have been removed after the Model Code of Conduct came into force in Kerala and up until counting day in the state. Election officials were absolutely objective and impartial in their enforcement of the code throughout the state and this helped them in ensuring that any sort of defacement was immediately dealt with. All political parties and candidates welcomed the move and took steps to adhere to the green protocol as much as possible.

- Office of CEO (Kerala)
THE POWER OF BELIEF AND POWER BANKS!

During my teenage years, I remember my father packing his bedding once every two or three years to go for election duty and when he returned home, he always had either of the two remarks stamped for eternity for the Returning Officer—an excellent one or an awful one. His comments never wavered between the two; it was always either ‘excellent’ or ‘awful’.

Jump back to the present - April 2019 and here I was, assigned as an Assistant Returning Officer of 28-Thanga Assembly Constituency in Manipur. My scorecard had two destinations—excellent or awful and I was determined to achieve the former; this being my first stint in anything remotely associated with elections.

As the days went by and I started reading the never ending manuals, the instructions which seemed like a labyrinth and came like a floodgate that had forgotten to close, I was convinced with an eerie belief that I am destined for nothing but ‘awful’ in my scorecard. The first day of training of polling personnel cemented that conviction; the microphone refused to wake up from its slumber, the projector had already given up on me, me and my team had misjudged on the number of print outs required, thereby segregating the room into two groups—the haves and the havenot’s-of training materials. The Have-nots gave me an icy glare while the Haves seemed to be thinking aloud, “What is she up to?”

Thus started the training schedule - and my hunch of an unpleasant scorecard didn’t leave me even for a second. The training schedule of the polling personnel left me and my small team high and dry, our bodies drained of its last bit of energy, our voices quivering after a long day of instructions and Do’s and Don’ts and no amount of juices or aerated drinks served during the training could remove the unshaken belief that me and my team silently bore- REPOLL-on account of my inexperienced self!
However, the last day of training gave me a flicker of hope; I saw some polling teams staying back after the training to have more ‘hands on experience’ time with the EVM and VVPAT machines; some came to me with queries that I, fortunately, was able to answer and some went swaying confidently as if assuring me not to worry.

Then came the day of dispersal, April 17, 2019 and after two hours of sleep, we were positioned at the dispersal centers, all set to disperse the polling teams to their respective Polling Stations. And they came, not in herds but in splinters; and by 1 PM, all my Polling Teams had left the dispersal centre. By 5 PM, I had an unsettling feeling; I received no calls or complaints whatsoever from my polling teams. Surely, this can’t be normal! A staff meeting was convened; the entire staff segregated into three teams, with me in one team and we set off to check on the polling teams. I went from one Polling Station to the other, my composure slowly giving away to a panic attack, because only one polling station had uninterrupted power supply—the rest had no power, the windstorm that occurred two days before had disrupted most of the power lines. The power department was frantically trying their best to ensure uninterrupted power supply, but given the terrain of my Assembly Constituency, it seemed like a far cry that evening. Nevertheless, I slept, praying for a miracle for the next day.

We woke up at 4am on the poll day April 18, 2019 and by 5:30 AM, we had called up all our Polling Teams and they sang in unison over the phone—“Low phone battery charge”. Someone suggested switching off all the phones of the polling party, except one phone. And this idea was chanted like a mantra by all. And hence one mobile phone with internet connection was kept on, one at a time. Around 8 AM, some of the Sector Magistrates echoed the same line, “Low phone battery charge” and even added one chorus, “might get switch off any moment”.

Disbelief turned into resilience and the next moment, we were collecting power banks from the staff and off we went again—to distribute power banks to the Sector Magistrates. A local Samaritan came forward offering one Sector Magistrate a generator to charge his phone; while another was helped by a Booth Level Officer. And then the calls started pouring in and my phone never stopped ringing for a minute. I vividly recall looking at my watch 5 minutes before 4 PM in disbelief—so far so good, no major incidents to worry about. Around 6 PM, when my first polling party arrived at the reception centre, I was beaming with pride and could not help wishing them with the widest smile my face had ever produced!

As I continued inspecting the polled materials they came to deposit, I saw brilliance in some of their hard work; they gave me no room for correction or improvement. And I stood there, in awe of their impeccable job in the conduct of my first election as an ARO and the flawless paper work they had submitted. For a fleeting moment there, I wanted my father to watch the scene. But I had to satiate myself with a passing thought, “It wasn’t awful, power banks saved the day!”

- Linda Ningombam, Assistant Returning Officer Bishnupur District
#GoAssist
Matdata Mitra
IN THE ABODE OF THE CLOUDS

Unleashing the power of poll volunteers for accessible elections

Matdata in Hindi means a voter, and Mitra means friend. In Meghalaya, with the objective of ensuring, ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’ over and above other measures and initiatives undertaken - hundreds of young and future voters were effectively mobilized as Matdata Mitras, in the recently concluded Lok Sabha Elections 2019, covering both the Shillong Parliamentary and Tura Parliamentary seats, spread over 3167 Polling Stations, across 60 Assembly Constituencies. Anchored on the firm belief, that it is critical to meaningfully engage the hearts and minds of impressionable young and future voters, a much larger dividend accrues from ensuring that it is only by actually empowering the youth that one can also tangibly power the nation. With this end in mind to ensure the fulfilment of the 3E’s of ‘Engage, Empower and Express’, the initiative to involve, train and deploy the Matdata Mitras became an article of faith for Meghalaya in the recently concluded LS 2019 in the context of Inclusive and Accessible Elections.

The journey commenced a few months prior to Lok Sabha Elections 2019, when the ECI sought specific inputs from the state for developing suitable guidelines on the functioning of Poll Volunteers, which envisaged an enlargement and deepening of their role for LS 2019. Accordingly, building on the basic premise of ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’, the role of the Poll Volunteer was gradually crafted and fashioned, aimed at meeting the objectives of inclusive and accessible elections. This initiative was gradually institutionalized by the ECI, as part of its general guidelines to achieve Assured Minimum Facilities (AMFs) in its entirety in a Polling Station which act as corner stones of electoral democracy. Through these assorted measures, the Poll Volunteer acquired a new centrality on being listed as a mandatory AMF requirement in Polling Stations, galvanizing Poll Volunteers to extend prompt and visible
assistance for the broad swathe of voters, covering the hitherto marginalized and left out categories of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), the aged and infirmed. Making a Polling Station completely accessible continues to be a challenge in hilly terrains like Meghalaya and ensuring smooth access for voters from road to Polling Stations due to rugged terrain is a task. But in scenarios where ramps exist in Polling Stations perched on precarious hill tops, Poll Volunteers emerged as the ideal solution to surmounting these logistic and geographical barriers, with their ready presence, acting as a robust bridge and support to the aged and infirmed, ultimately making access of the marginalized to Polling Stations, both a doable and an achievable exercise.

Preparations towards this end, started in right earnest, as the support of all key stakeholders was readily enlisted, drawing on members of leading Youth Organisations of the state, such as MBSG, NSS, NYK and also involving Ashas, Anganwadis and Community Resource & Rehabilitation Workers in those locations, where a youth organisations’ presence was not pronounced.

After a series of detailed deliberations, it was decided that the Scouts & Guides, would cover all Polling Booths located in schools, both in rural and urban areas, the NSS meanwhile would expand its reach to all such Polling Stations located in colleges, and in urban pockets and in District HQs, whereas the NYK would cover Rural areas, and in locations and hamlets where its rural volunteers were functioning. This was followed by a State Level Workshop in collaboration with the Josh Talks Team of motivators and influencers. The training dwelled on aspects ranging from orientation about the constitutional and democratic rights, to accessible elections with a deep focus on a Poll Volunteers specific role and on how to be engaged meaningfully with the electoral process. The training also paved the way for sensitizing and orienteering the freshly minted volunteers to gain first-hand experience, exposure, besides offering a ring side view of the entire Polling and Electoral Canvas.

Post training and prior to their deployment as Poll Volunteer each volunteer was provided colourful Poll Volunteer kits, comprising Election branded T-Shirts, Caps and other paraphernalia to facilitate their visible and active presence and deployment in the field.

On Poll Day, the Poll Volunteers truly lived up to their task and were seen at many places actively assisting the PWD, the aged and infirmied in various Polling Stations. In some moving images, Poll Volunteers stood proud testimony to the ethos of compassion in action carrying physically disabled voters, holding a senior citizens hand and escorting them to their respective Polling Stations, readily lending their shoulders to support the weak, old and needy. The striking images of young shoulders and tender hands/eagerly and compassionately shouldering the tasks entrusted, remains etched indelibly in the public consciousness.

Undoubtedly, the meaningful engagement of the Poll Volunteers this time, generated a substantial amount of goodwill amongst
the voting community, at large, and particularly amongst the marginalized and peripheral voters for whom Poll Volunteer’s involvement will be long remembered and cherished. Leading editors in their editorials lauded the maiden foray of Poll Volunteers in the election process on Poll Day. In an editorial appearing in the state’s leading daily, it was mentioned by the state’s leading editor that “the ECI has done its job commendably surpassing past efforts, and actually turning the phrase “No Voter to be Left Behind” a reality……this time the CEO has pulled all the stops to enable physically disabled voter and the elderly cast their votes without hassle…. boy scouts, girl guides and NSS volunteers were seen assisting voters and volunteering happily in all the activities”.

The nascent promptings of this initiative has set a benchmark in electoral engagement of the youth, and is definitely going to have a positive ramification and a wider ripple effect, and perhaps herald a deeper and positive engagement of young people in all future elections. The authentic connect established is a manifestation of that trust, which in years ahead, is sure to further expand the narrative of inclusive democracy achieved through accessible elections. The legacy achieved undoubtedly is that of a Poll Volunteer’s indelible connect with democratic ethos and electoral democracy. Poll Volunteers collective involvement on poll day, in fact, contributed substantially to amplify the message of an increasingly inclusive and accessible election. These combined efforts will definitely fulfil the noble mandate of multiplying the electoral reach both in a physical tangible sense, and also in ways, that are intangible, sending out a loud message that there is an election machinery that cares about its young, its old and infirm and disabled that it is concerned for each and every voter, and that, truly every voter counts. To this effect, the Poll Volunteer has truly acted as a living bridge to democracy and in the process of being empowered, has also empowered the nation and, which in turn has enriched the entire inter play between the voter, the Poll Volunteer and the voting experience especially for the PwD, aged and infirm.

The involvement, meaningful engagement and services rendered by the Poll Volunteers was duly recognized and their engagement would be continued and sustained through the ECI’s democratic platform of Electoral Literacy Clubs and Chunav Pathshalas.

- Office of CEO (Meghalaya)
Innovative Approach for Young Voters

Meaningful democracy requires the meaningful participation of youth. Their participation in democracy promotes active citizenship, strengthens social responsibility and can enhance democratic processes and institutions. And today’s young citizens are tomorrow’s leaders and decision-makers. Along with the rest of the country, Mizoram, one of the most remote States of North East India championed the ‘Catch’em Young’ campaign to woo more young voters through its Young Voters’ Club during the process of General Elections to Lok Sabha 2019.

Young voters are often better informed, educated and tech-savvy especially in a State like Mizoram where literacy rate is the second highest in the country. The Young Voters’ Club which was formed in March, 2019 has already shown fruitful results in the poll held on April 11, 2019. Infact, a local newspaper ‘Vanglaini’ had written that for the first time the youth of Mizoram were excited and enthusiastic to exercise their franchise hence turn outs were also better than any other Lok Sabha Elections. Even though the State is
strategically located in the most cornered of North East, the impact of Social Media among the youths cannot be undermined. For the first time, the CEO’s office, Mizoram reached out to around 25 Mizo youths who can be regarded as Influencers in Social Media so that awareness campaign on voting is done through them. The influencers of Mizoram’s Social Media were urged to update their profiles, status etc with digital posters and videos featuring them which went viral in the digital world during the run-up to Elections.

Apart from this, for the first time ever, a Young Voters’ Fest was organized at Aizawl’s prestigious college Govt. Hrangbana College where College students were imparted the importance of voting, their voice which matters in our democratic system. The campaign was a huge success where young students participated in different competitions like painting, poetry writing, slogan writing, public speaking, beat contest etc. Hundreds of youth who participated pledged to cast their vote on that day; and the result was observed on the poll day.

Tech Savvy young voters were also motivated to demonstrate their skills through digital competitions like mobile video making and Selfie contests held on poll day. Mobile Video making competition with its theme ‘Importance of Voting’ saw entries from all corners of Mizoram, while the Selfie Competition was striking, apart from participations among Mizo youths, entries were received from other States too during their own respective poll day. The task to engage young voters in our Democratic process from another approach rather than their textbooks is not a simple one. In fact, it was a bold step from the CEO’s office to reach out to the post millennial generation of voters whose interests are totally different. The story of Mizoram’s CEO’s office initiative to attract young voters doesn’t and will not end here; it will remain in the heart of the people across the State and can be a replica for others. For days to come, this innovative approach will continue with a spirit of John Heywood’s famous phrase, “Rome wasn’t built in a day”.

- Office of CEO (Mizoram)

**MEANINGFUL DEMOCRACY REQUIRES THE MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH.**
For Lok Sabha 2019, it was decided that special attention needed to be given to Senior Citizens to secure their participation in the electoral process. There was also a need to sensitize the election machinery about the special needs of the senior citizens.

There were around 96 centenarian voters in Delhi whose database was available with the CEO office. CEO Delhi felt a special sense of responsibility towards centenarian voters and as a mark of respect to their age and their commitment towards voting it was decided to pay individual attention to each one of them.

Accordingly, Sector Officers of the concerned area were directed by CEO Delhi to meet the centenarian voters at their residence in advance, motivate them to vote and to inform them of the facilities at the polling station viz volunteer with wheel chair, ramp, shade, cold drinking water and most importantly queue-less priority voting for them.

CEO Delhi had given clear instructions to Sector Officers that they would personally pick and drop the Centenarian Voters on poll day and ensure hassle free voting followed by felicitation. When the centenary voters came to polling stations, it was not less than a celebration. They were greeted, garlanded and escorted for voting. Some Centenary voters were accompanied by their children, grand children and entire family.

After seeing one centenary voter’s photographs in the newspaper a friend of his, who had somehow lost touch with the voter, approached ECI for the contact details and they were ultimately reunited. The Office of the CEO Delhi is really proud of the initiative to honor the centenarian voters as a humble tribute to this democratic participation over their life-time.
No Voter to be Left Behind

‘No Voter to be Left Behind’ was the motto of Election Commission of India during General Elections 2019. The CEO Delhi had strived hard to make the election Inclusive and Accessible in a true sense especially with regard to Persons with Disability (PwD). In the case of PwD voters, the number of PwD voters was abysmally low in the beginning at around 4000. CEO office Delhi had appointed 2 State PwD icons namely Ankur Dhama and Neeraj Yadav who were present in various PwD related programmes organized by the CEO office to motivate the PwD voters and appealed for increased PwD voter participation through print and electronic media. Further four radio jingles specifically made to motivate the PwD voters were also playing in FM radio on daily basis. As a result of these efforts enrollment of PwD voters increased to more than 40,000 at the time of cut-off date.

While making appeals for increased participation, CEO sent a clear message through press conferences, Doordarshan and Radio programmes, print media etc that every PwD voter will be ensured Queue less priority voting and the facilities of wheel chair and volunteer at every polling station location, Ramp, Sign language posters, Sensitized polling personnel and police, Dummy Braille ballot papers at every polling booth and transport facility for pick and drop of PwD, Senior Citizen and infirm voters.

Proper planning and implementation of pick and drop facility was a crucial and final step in ensuring the enrolled PwD and senior citizen voters to actually vote on the polling day. Directions were issued to Booth Level Officers for booth wise mapping of PwDs and the assessment of the requirement for transport facility on the poll day.

PwD nodal officers appointed in each district ensured 100% booth wise mapping of the PwDs by BLOs. Thus, every Returning officer had the database of the PwD voters who had placed prior request for pick and drop facility for poll day.

Around 1071 vehicles were deployed across all the PCs in Delhi which transported around 3707 PwD voters to and from polling station locations. It was very heartwarming to see volunteers bringing the PwD voters with care and compassion to the polling booths. The response of the PwD voters and their families was overwhelming as they were very touched by this gesture extended to them.

- Office of CEO (Delhi)

PWD Voters - LS Election 2019
Conducting Election in Maoist affected districts

Kandhamal District is a Maoist affected district located in central Odisha and bound by Boudh district on the North, Rayagada district on South, Ganjam and Nayagarh district on the east and Kalahandi district on the west. The population of the district is 8,40,764 and the voters population is 5,45,177 including service voters. The total number of polling stations is 659 spread across the hilly terrain of Kandhamal district.

The poll in Kandhamal district was scheduled in the second phase of the General Election 2019. On April 16, dispersal of polling parties was initiated and on April 18, poll was conducted across Kandhamal district. It was during the second phase of elections, that Maoists executed several armed attacks on polling parties and employees on election duty to disrupt the law and order situation in the district and to prohibit the polling party from doing their election duty. They also tried to create fear among the electors so as to debar them from exercising their fundamental right to vote and participate in the largest festival of Indian democracy. On April 16, the polling parties left for their respective polling stations from the dispersal centre barring a few as there was intelligence input received regarding Maoist activity and expected attacks on some polling stations. The polling party for Mingunpadar polling station was among the few who left the dispersal centre on the morning of April 17. On their way, the polling party suddenly faced land mine explosion triggered by armed Maoists. Fortunately, both the vehicles escaped from the land mine and stopped on the spot. Suddenly, armed Maoists came out from the nearby bushes and asked all polling parties to get down from the vehicles. The ultras then torched both the vehicles and bike of the BLO including the EVMs & VVPATs and other belongings. They threatened the polling party to return and never come back to the polling station for polling. The polling party returned to the dispersal centre but the poll had to be conducted keeping in mind the spirit of democracy. The District Election Administration with the help of the police administration and support of Para Military forces prepared a plan to conduct poll and arrange a substitute polling party for Booth No. 30 Mingunpadar under Phiringia Block/84-Phulbani (ST) Assembly Constituency. The substitute polling party started their journey by foot to the polling station and successfully conducted poll on April 18, returning safely back to the receiving centre by foot with a security cordon of Para Military forces.

The Maosits executed several attempts to attack polling parties on their way back to the receiving centre by cutting down trees to block the road. But due to timely intelligence inputs and counter planning of Para Military Forces, all the polling parties reached the receiving centre safely, although some of them had to return using alternate ways through dense hilly forests by foot in the tight security cordon of Para Military forces. Not for once did the values and spirit of the largest democracy in the world dwindle.

- Office of CEO (Odisha)
EVM - VVPAT AWARENESS
Motivating the Puducherrians for ‘Enhanced Participation’

A thriving democracy is not possible where public participation is limited. Limited participation may be attributed to various reasons - the prime being ‘chosen ignorance’ or ‘lack of knowledge’. Distrust, uncertainty or lack of confidence in the system is the consequence of inadequate knowledge or understanding of the same. To preserve the integrity and evenhandedness of Elections, informed citizens become imperative for which electoral literacy and citizens’ participation in public affairs becomes vital.

Any democratic election requires informed participation. When barriers to learning and participation are identified and minimized, the challenges faced can be mitigated. One such challenge faced by the Elections Department was in substantiating the reliability of the EVMs to the Puducherrians. We realized that in order to drive this home, hands-on experience was essential.
To Make Participation Of Citizens Meaningful

It is imperative that citizen participation is directly linked to their own first-hand experience and what emerges from the experience can be shared and developed to promote more effective democratic involvement of other co-citizens. Therefore, the Elections Department of Puducherry in line with the objective of the ECI, adopted target specific EVM-VVPAT awareness voter outreach programs to educate the people on the reliability and authenticity in the utilization of EVMs and VVPATs in Elections, thereby increasing people’s participation in the Electoral process.

The Election Department of Puducherry came up with an action plan of EVM-VVPAT awareness camps / workshops that was held for various segments of the society like Women, PwDs, Senior citizens, Marginalized sectors, Youth, Industries/Corporate Sectors, Universities, Judicial department/ Court, CII (Confederation of Indian Industries) etc. Furthermore, two EVM-VVPAT awareness mobile vans were deployed to tour around the constituencies of Pondicherry to reach out to the grassroots in order to create awareness.

The tremendous efforts taken by the Elections Department evinced fruitful results in the General Election to Lok Sabha 2019. The UT of Puducherry saw an immense increase of electors by more than fifty thousand and an increase in voter turnout by more than seventy two thousand than the previous Lok Sabha Elections in 2014.

- Office of CEO (Puducherry)
‘Naa Vote’ App for complete Voter Facilities & Services

For Lok Sabha Election 2019, Telangana launched a handy App to enable electors to check their names in the voters’ lists besides knowing about their polling station details. This novel mobile voter facilitation app, Naa Vote, is a first-of-its-kind IT application. Launched in the runup to the Telangana State Legislative Assembly Elections; the app has proved to be successful with lakhs of electors downloading it for their Android and iOS Phones. The app was upgraded with additional features for the Parliamentary Elections and is now available in 4 languages: Hindi, Telugu, Urdu and English.

This unique app was developed by Hyper Thread Solutions and launched by the Chief Electoral Officer of Telangana, Dr. Rajat Kumar on November 29, 2018 for the benefit of the voters of Telangana.

‘Naa Vote’ meaning ‘My Vote’ is a joint endeavour of the Telangana government and the NGO, ‘Let’s Vote’ in collaboration with Hyper Thread Solutions, not only to make the citizens more aware but also to serve them in a more efficient manner. Its highlight, however, is the feature for PwDs (Persons with Disabilities) which
enables the voters under the said category to request pick from home to the polling station and back home via this app.

While hitherto, the voters had relied on manual lists and many a time, even verbal information about the polling stations and candidates, this app comes as a fresh alternative for voters who need instant access to information like voting lists, polling stations, routes to these stations, contesting candidate categories, personal electoral details, and even so much as requesting commutation arrangements for the voters under PwD category.

Keeping in mind the busy schedule that people have in the present times, this app provides them all election related information on the go! All you need to do in order to find the information that you need is feed in the EPIC number, constituency, and area. Moreover, there is no registration required on this app!

There are nearly 35,000 polling stations across the State, and it is no wonder that many voters, especially senior citizens, faced problems in identifying their polling booth at the time of assembly polls. ‘Naa Vote’ consists of a smart navigation assistant which guides the voter to reach the respective polling booth easily. This is just one of the several features incorporated in this app. It can be used for searching EPIC details, finding information of polling station and name, concerned BLO contact, constituency and candidates etc.

‘Naa Vote’, which is just a few months old, has already been downloaded by 2.6 lakh electors and the number steadily increases. Also, Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) were able place pick up service requests and also contact PwD volunteers through this app. The State Election Authorities have left no stone unturned in creating awareness in the public about this new app and its many advantages.

- Office of CEO (Telangana)

### ‘Naa Vote’ app features

1. Search Voter ID in Electoral Roll
   - a) By details: Name, Father Name/Husband, Age, Gender, District, Assembly Constituency
   - b) By EPIC Number

2. DEOs and ERO details district wise and constituency wise. Polling station wise details available

3. Candidates information Constituency wise

4. Locations of nearest Police Stations and Bus Stops

5. Pick up service may be requested for PwD electors by entering EPIC Number

6. PwD Volunteers information for PwD Voters by searching District and Assembly Constituency

7. Directions to Reach Polling Station by entering EPIC Number along with details of Metro, taxi and bus suggestions

8. Electoral Registration by Online Forms

As many as 2.6 lakh people in the state have downloaded the Naa Vote application, which is available in four languages.
The real way to gain happiness is to give it to others

When elections are won or lost by a large majority it can give people—particularly young people, the impression that their votes don’t matter. They see the situation as very simple. The outcome would be the same regardless of whether they had exercised their vote or not. However this attitude is not only damaging and cultivates a dangerous sense of apathy, it also is very incorrect. In states that are overwhelmingly red or blue, it really can feel like your vote is lost in a sea that is either with you or against you. However Uttar Pradesh Bharat Scouts & Guides demonstrated the sheer importance of one vote in a democracy.

In the campaign of Lok Sabha Election 2019, Uttar Pradesh Bharat Scouts & Guides took 75 districts of U.P. under them with guidance from the district organization of U.P.B.S.G. The Rover/Ranger and Scout/Guide of B.S.G played a vital role in the movement of spreading awareness for the importance of the voting. Nukkad Nataks (street plays), competitions like slogan writing, essay writing, taking out rallies with encouraging banners, flags and wearing special T-shirts along with their uniforms to motivate voters were just some of the efforts made on their part. With great support from their leaders, the scouts and guides formed a team named ‘Bulawa Toly’ that went around the community inviting people by knocking on every door and spreading the importance of voting. The Guides main focused on women from small and economically backward households and encouraged them to vote. 10-17 years old Scouts & Guides provided assistance to old aged, handicapped and every possible voter who needed any kind of help at the time while standing in the queue to vote.

The hard work of the leaders and team work of Scouts/Guides and Rover/Rangers was not only praised but appreciated by both the government and local authorities. By providing assistance to those in need, the entire organization achieved not only honour, but also mental strength from selfless work apart from getting a great experience in the field.

- Office of CEO (Uttar Pradesh)
PRINT MEDIA
“I Choose Not To Place Dis In My Ability”

The very foundation of democracy lies in the representation of all stakeholders and an indispensable part of nation building starts with the inclusion of all in its electoral process. To uphold the spirit of free and fair election, the Election Commission of India had declared ‘Accessible Election’ as the theme for General Election, 2019. The theme seamlessly integrates the underlying philosophy of universal adult suffrage and the concept of ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’.

Murshidabad district promptly accepted this spirit and started emulating the ideals of the Commission from SRER 2019 itself with a determination to achieve the target of 100% participation of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) electors, Infirm voters, Pregnant women, Lactating mothers and Migrant labours to cover all categories of marginalised voters. To achieve the vision of Accessible Election, the creation of awareness among masses is an integral part, which was followed by the concept of creation of district mascot Guti Pisi, - a middle-aged woman animated in the shape of the cocoon of a silkworm representing the silk culture of Murshidabad. This mascot was utilized massively in the entire election process in different awareness campaigns.

Accessible Enrolment and Inclusion

The categories of voters like PwDs, pregnant women, lactating mothers who face hindrances in participating in the election process were identified as Priority voters and focus was given to them. Identification and mapping of these electors is the inception of the Accessible Election. The task, no doubt, was arduous. The proper planning and its decentralised implementation with the optimum utilisation of existing resources helped to identify the Priority electors throughout the district and to map them polling station wise. The massive human resources of district and block level was deployed to collect data regarding the Priority voters. In addition to this, data was also extracted from different social welfare schemes like Manavik, the scheme for physically challenged persons, census, etc.

Once identification was completed, a special drive was conducted to facilitate the registration of priority
voters. The goal was to achieve barrier-free electoral registration. Since this process of improving and strengthening accessibility requires a creation of massive awareness, different awareness campaigns were conducted like:

1. Formation of Accessible Chunav Adda
2. Appointment of PwD ambassadors
3. Motivation through ELCs at block level
4. PwDs Olympic
5. Accessible Conclave formed at block level encouraging active participation of Priority voters
6. Different motivational videos featuring Guti Pisi

In the entire process of awareness creation, different challenges and barriers faced by Priority Voters in relation to electoral registration were noticed and a well-planned strategy was developed to address all these challenges and obstacles.

1. Enrolment was carried out in Mission Mode at all the 5706 polling stations in the district under the leadership of all senior district officials like DEO, ROs, AROs, SDOs, BDOs, Sector officers, Booth level officers. It is worth mentioning that our district has achieved an electoral gender ratio of 958 from 941, the rise of 17 basis points in female electoral ratio.

2. Special drive for registration of mentally retarded persons resulting in registration of around 63 persons with psychosocial disability in electoral roll of the 72 Berhampore AC- highest in West Bengal.

3. Special Enrolment Drive Day for the PwD electors.

4. Observation of Adhikar Diwas in the presence of the DEO, SDOs, BDOs creating a platform to create a compiled data of PwD electors polling booth wise with an active participation of Health Department, Women and Child & Welfare Department, SHGs, and other

5. Guti Pissi Abhijan: A house-to-house visit was conducted by a team of ASHA workers, Aaganwadi workers, BLOs for facilitating the registration of all the left out PwD voters ensuring 100% enrolment.

6. Voter’s facilitation centres were made available at district, sub-divisional and block level where one can seek any kind of help related to enrolment.
Accessible Awareness

The barrier free enrolment was only the first step of an accessible election. The road was long and what kept us going was the mantra of ‘No voter to be Left Behind’. Now, another big task was to ensure the 100% voter turnout of Priority voters. A separate SVEEP plan was prepared incorporating information, education and motivation for PwDs, infirm voters, pregnant women and lactating mothers. A SVEEP nodal officer was appointed at district, sub-divisional and blocks level whose responsibility was to devise a plan and to implement it to accommodate each and every Priority voter in election process. The Priority voters were made aware and educated intensively through many modes like:

1. Sahajpath: A beep mat aided audio and video learning is developed for visually impaired and in the same way this also works for deaf and dumb electors in which they will learn through sign languages displayed in mobile app version of Sahajpath. The goal was to give them first-hand experience of entire election process.

2. Accessible materials like braille leaflets were distributed in different awareness campaign and programmes.

3. PwD icon was selected at district level. His name is Sanjib Pal, who had played the World Cup 1995 in Australia. He is from Berhampore, Murshidabad. A motivational video was made featuring him, which was extensively used in different platforms like cable TV, cinema halls, and different display corners at different government offices for creating awareness among voters.

4. One PwD icon was selected at each block who actively participated in different programmes creating awareness and motivation among PwD voters. A short video on each PwD icon documenting their life was developed which was used to create motivation among voters.

5. Different SVEEP activities were conducted at different special schools and ELC levels like Sit and draw competition, slogan writing competition, voteathon involving PwD voters to motivate them.

6. Use of print media like newspaper inserts with powerful messages were distributed to make guardian of these differently-abled voters aware.

7. Voice message and SMS were sent for creating awareness.

Raju Mahato, a visually-impaired B.Ed. student experiencing Sahajpath for a first-hand experience of election process
Accessible Infrastructure

Along with accessible inclusion and enrolment, an accessible casting of vote is another main component of accessible election. The Assured Minimum Facilities on poll day were made available for Priority voters.

Not only that, an accessible audit of polling booth was conducted to have proper picture of booth and to strengthen the basic minimum facilities for Priority voters. According to the recommendations of accessible audit, many other basic facilities were added like:

1. A new dedicated wheelchair to 490 polling stations and on sharing basis in other polling stations.
2. Magnifying glass for voters with low vision.
3. Transport facility for mentally challenged voters, locomotor disabled voters, terminally pregnant women, old and infirm voters, sick voters, etc.

4. A help desk comprising of 2 ASHA and Aanganwadi workers for each polling station.

5. Priority Stamping for PwD voters.

6. Creche for lactating mothers

7. Recommendations of DMCAE & AMCAE Committee were implemented properly.

Special Mechanism to collect turnout

The special mechanism was developed to collect total turnout of priority voters. Different forms were developed like Priority 1 for PwD voters, Priority 2 for pregnant and lactating women, and Priority 4 for sector officers and Priority 5 for Block Development Officers. The P1 and P2 forms were collected by the Presiding Officer and submitted to the concerned sector officer who compiled all data and certified these data in P4 form and submitted to the concerned BDO. Finally, the concerned BDO send the compiled data of all the polling booths under his jurisdiction to the district in P5 for final data.

- Office of CEO (West Bengal)
How India Celebrated Festive Voting
VOTER EXPERIENCES

Voting against all odds

Indian General Elections have been the biggest Festival of Democracy since inception. From ballot papers to electronic voting machines, it has come a long way. What has tremendously helped in keeping the election process moving is the indomitable spirit of Indian electors. At some instance, even a terminal disease couldn’t stop some of the electors to venture out to cast their vote.

Manraj Kaur, 56-year-old cancer patient suffering from last stage breast cancer is one such example where even failing health didn’t stop her to join other voters to travel to polling booth to press the EVM button. Undergoing treatment at Christian Medical College (CMC), Ludhiana, Manraj Kaur took a break from her Chemotherapy session to cast her vote on a scorching Sunday on May 19. She felt a little exhausted after casting her vote and had to be driven back.

Displaying exemplary dedication towards nation building, an octogenarian NRI couple from UK travelled all the way from London to cast their vote. 84-year-old Swaran Singh and his 8-year-old wife Dilraj Kaur specially flew down from UK to cast their vote in Mohali. The fact that Dilraj Kaur is wheel chair bound couldn’t dampen their spirits. The octogenarian couple believed that it was their duty to vote and also the right thing to do to respect democracy. Strongly believing in the fact that voting is instrumental in strengthening the democracy, they have always been encouraging others to ensure their votes count as well.

While there were electors who came out to exercise their franchise despite grave health conditions or challenging situations; there were others who multiplied their personal celebrations along with Festival of Democracy. Lakhwinder Singh of Mohali district came to cast his vote first before heading for his wedding procession. Likewise, there were many other examples in the state of Punjab where couples came to cast their vote first before solemnizing wedding vows.

Sunita Sharma from Rajasthan had a brain stroke on May 14, 2014 and was paralysed on the right side of her body. After being in an ICU for 18 days, she was operated upon when she suffered from brain stem compression - a life threatening condition.

Recovering gradually, she expressed her wish to vote in the Lok Sabha Elections 2019. I took her to the Polling Booth where she successfully cast her vote in the true spirit of democracy.
“I am still young to vote,” said Th. Nupimacha Devi with a wrinkled smile when she came out from the voting compartment after giving her mandate for the 17th Lok Sabha Election, 2019 for 1- Inner Manipur Parliamentary Constituency Seat.

Despite being hearing impaired due to her age, her desire to cast vote at 102 years of age was indeed inspiring to many present at the polling station. The polling personnel greeted her with utmost respect and gifted a watch to her. It was indeed a touching moment and a fitting token of appreciation for her initiative at such an old age. The idea of separate queue for the PwDs, lactating m o t h e r s and the elderly was indeed a masterstroke to ensure total participation for Lok Sabha Election 2019.

The day I cast my first vote, I remember coming out of the booth feeling victorious. I was just eighteen years of age then. For my father I was just a child, naive to take important decisions of life, but that tiny ink stain on my finger made me feel like a champion who was capable of choosing his Government and leaders. Nothing has changed till date. I still feel like the most important person whenever I cast my vote, as we know for a fact that each vote makes a difference.

Every single press of a button on an EVM is like a drop that fills up the vast ocean of our vibrant democracy, and to ensure that each one of us must come out and vote. Even at this ripe age my memory doesn’t fail me. In spite of my age, I have never missed any election and have voted in every single one of them. The first vote I had cast was at Delhi in the year 1949. Since then I have been fulfilling that duty with conviction. Even though I am 103 years old and not very physically fit, but I will definitely cast my vote in the upcoming election. If I can do it, anyone can do it. Your vote shapes the nation’s direction. You must use it wisely.

Everybody must vote. It’s your right to do so. Even a single vote is enough to be the deciding factor. There have been instances where one vote has turned out to be the deciding quotient. A single vote may be like a drop in an ocean but it makes the mandate more wholesome and warranted. Upto the last election, I have always went back to my home town to cast my vote, considering it is my duty. But this time around, I will be voting here in Chandigarh. The local citizens must step out and vote. If they choose the right candidate, he/she will work for their development and amelioration only. Thus your vote also becomes the deciding factor for your area’s future as well.
Shyama S. Prabha

While earlier social stigma held us back along with technical difficulties like the lack of proper paperwork post being thrown out by our families after coming out, now slowly and surely we are finding respectable jobs and means of earning allowing us to survive in society without compromising our self-respect. And as the next step in our life, it is important for us to engage in the democratic process to ensure that we are also a part of the electorate and we are also party to the decision making process of who should rule the country and state.

Om Prakash Shrivastava

In the Lok Sabha election 2019 by the Election Commission, the Handicapped voters are being provided facilities through the Divyang App to assist them to cast their vote. Despite being blind, Om Prakash Shrivastava, resident of Ward number 13 Anuppur gave his precious vote by reaching the polling booth with the Divyang app. He said that with the convenience given to him by the Election Commission, and the efficient behaviour of voting personnel, he could also become a participant in the festival of this democracy.

The tradition and culture of India is the identity of the country and, the feeling of love and unity always remains paramount in us. When a family celebrates every festival together, why leave the festival of the country alone? 85-year-old Swaroop Chandra Jain, in Kotma of Anuppur, and his whole family did their duty by voting together in the polling station 95. He was accompanied by his wife 82-year-old Kamala Jain, and three sons and daughters. The district administration appreciated the democratic values given by the family of Chandra Jain and called them examples of the true spirit of democracy.
Know the Electoral Facts of Our Nation
Proud to be the Largest Democracy of the World

Women Participation in Lok Sabha Elections 2019

Bridging the Gender Gap:

- No. of registered women voters for 2019 elections was 438,491,517 as compared to 397,049,941 for 2014 elections.
- Gender ratio in the electoral rolls increased to a historic 930 in 2019 as compared to 908 in 2014.
- Gender gap between male and female voters reduced to just 0.10% in 2019 elections as compared to 1.46% in 2014 election.
- 18 States & UTs (A&N Islands - 65.38%, Arunachal Pradesh - 80.70%, Bihar - 59.60%, Chandigarh - 70.83%, Dadra & Nagar Haveli - 81.17%, Daman and Diu - 75.47%, Goa - 76.16%, Himachal Pradesh - 72.08%, Jharkhand - 64.92%, Kerala - 78.80%, Lakshadweep - 86.49%, Manipur - 84.14%, Meghalaya - 73.94%, Odisha - 74.14%, Puducherry - 81.52%, Tamil Nadu - 72.20%, Uttarakhand - 64.45%, West Bengal - 81.80%) recorded higher female participation than male participation in Lok Sabha election 2019.
- At least one All-Woman managed polling station established in each Assembly Constituency of the country during Lok Sabha Election 2019 where entire polling staff, including police officer and security personnel deployed were women.
- 78 Women MPs have been elected in Lok Sabha 2019 election compared to 62 Women MPs elected in 2014 election.

Targeted Interventions:

- Designing targeted campaigns: - Women centric messages in outdoor and mass media outreach. Newly married young women specifically identified.
- Monitoring Gender gaps in voter registration: - Door-to-Door information and motivation through ASHA/Anganwadi Workers, Shiksha Mitras and other ground formations.
- Stakeholders participation: - Partnering with SHGs and Cooperatives of women to spread awareness.
- Creating facilities for ease of voting: - Women voters facilitated through separate queues, toilet arrangements, crèches and volunteers at polling stations.
- National and State Icons & role models: - Popular faces of women empowerment like MC Mary Kom and Saina Nehwal.
- Increase in engagement of women: - Women specific activities like rangoli, group songs competition etc in rural areas to motivate their electoral participation.

*Other thematic facts about 2019 Elections will be published in next series.
OUTDOOR DISPLAYS
EXPERIENCES OF ELECTION OFFICIALS

Indomitable spirit of democracy

Presiding Officer
T. Pramosini Devi

“W”e are on a National Duty” still echoes in my ears, shouted by the Assistant Returning Officer in the highest base of volume during the training. Anyone hardly bothered to pay the least heed to his loud utterances during the initial trainings. But who knew that these would become the magical words that penetrated well within our mind and body, compelling the dramatic arousal of our inner conscience to display the highest order of sincerity, commitment and dedication, in no way lesser than our brave hearts fighting to protect our Frontiers.

Yes, it was a great adventure, unique in its own way. The appointment as Presiding Officer did not quite seem interesting initially. As the elections came closer, the intensity of seriousness regarding our role and duties became crystal clear and all of us got irreversibly immersed into the process. Trainings became frequent and lively, and had been the actual source for instilling all the adjectives required for the perfect execution.

Beginning from the date of dispersal, not everything was to our comfort, yet the efforts put up as a team by the ARO and his colleagues was heartening. As we reached the Polling Station, the real festival of democracy was unfolding. It was well decorated as it generally happens on grand occasions. It was a special feeling to be at the Model Polling Station of Konthoujam Assembly Constituency. The anxiety for the poll the next day had completely swept away the comfort of our eyes in the night. Meanwhile, the bonding of oneness in the team had ushered in without notice and obviously resulted in display of highest order of team spirit. It clocked 3:00 A.M. in the polling station as all of us started our make-up and attire in the best dresses. At 4:00 A.M., we got a wake-up call from ARO office with a gentle request to deck up and be ready for ‘The Day’. At 4:30 A.M., we were all decked up and refreshed with silent prayers to God for smooth sailing.

Soon, with the advent of sunshine, came the Polling Agents and few voters who happily obliged to our gentle request for being in queue. Fortunately, the Polling Agents were cooperative and together we had a smooth mock poll sailing and subsequent commencement of the Poll at the appointed hours. 85-year-old Chaobi came out of her comfort to exercise her franchise and the kind of ever ready assistance from my colleagues made my day. Voters wearing colorful smiles in long queues for exercising their franchise in a free, fair and peaceful way were in itself a scenic beauty. Selfie points installed just outside the Polling Station were a huge hit for the first time voters. The ever enthusiastic Booth Level Officer’s Voter Assistance Booth acted as a guide and helping hand to everyone. Elaborate arrangements with precision for the PwDs and the keenness displayed by them for casting their votes were an inspiration. Pregnant women, Lactating mothers and Elderly voters were also given special attention. Attendance of teams from Social Welfare and Medical Departments added more color to the atmosphere. We cared, we loved, we sacrificed and we volunteered for the voters to have them exercise their franchise in the
peaceful, free, fair manner and with utmost ease. The feeling of being on ‘National Duty’ was realized.

The fragrance of the real sense of accomplishment was felt when few voters acknowledged and appreciated our efforts. They were all praise for the Election Commission for such precise planning and execution and for such elaborate arrangements. It was realized and reinforced that even women are capable enough to handle such tricky and challenging situations. And as a special gift for my children and husband back home, a series of inspiring stories were already built up in my mind to be narrated. As we reached the Reception Centre for depositing all the Polling Materials/EVM/VVPAT and other documents we felt the exhaustion of our minds and bodies. But again, the words of appreciation by the ARO and his team instilled in us some energy and the sense of accomplishment was reinforced. My beloved children along with my husband were waiting to pick me up and they led me back to the normal life, but with an enlightened mind and a determination to assist fellow human beings. And for my team that sailed together, we are now a happy gang of close and caring friends. Thank God for the wonderful opportunity.

A man named Loung Ung once stated- “Voting is not only a right, it is our power”. Voting is a formal expression of an individual’s choice for or against some motion. Voting is the heart of democracy. A government that is truly democratic ensures that its laws do not discriminate or discourage people from voting, especially those belonging to underrepresented communities of color, young people and senior citizens. Voting is a method for an individual, group, such as the meeting or an electorate, in order to make a collective decision or express an opinion. As long as people are given the chance to vote, to choose their representatives and their stance on social and political issues, then democracy is working. That is why it is important to ensure that every eligible voter is registered and exercises his/her right. Your vote is your way of being represented in the government. That means making a choice. It’s crucial for you to vote because voting is not just our right it is our responsibility. The practice of voting enables a person with the right to question the government about issues and seek clarification. Active citizenship keeps the government on its toes and voting gives people the opportunity to voice their opinion on issues that matter the most. The feeling of empowerment is surely progressive and liberating. As the Assistant Returning Officer (A.R.O) of assembly constituency named 40 Naugawan Sadat which lies under the parliamentary constituency 09 Amroha, our election team not only made people aware about their voting rights but also encouraged them to participate in the recent General Constituency Elections of 2019 due to which the voting percentage in 40 Naugawan Sadat hiked up to 74.47% this year making it the highest vote casting percentage all over 09 Amroha constituency. Making a decision that is informed and casting your vote with the confidence of bringing in the best government for yourself and the people of the nation is important. Your voice, your choice, your vote matters the most. We the people of India, make India.
Assistant Exchange Officer
Md. Imran Khan

It was on a warm sunny day somewhere in the month of February 2019, that I was informed of my appointment as Sector Officer in respect of Jiribam District, Manipur, in connection with the conduct of General Election to Lok Sabha, 2019. Long story cut short, I was assigned as Sector Officer covering the polling stations of 40/16 – Babukhal and 40/17 – Boroikhal in Borobeka Sub-Division of Jiribam. Now, the peculiarity of these two polling stations was that they were accessible through waterways only i.e., by using boats.

So, I was partly excited, partly apprehensive and partly exhilarated when I reported for my duty in the morning of April 10, 2019 at DC Office Complex, Jiribam. I quickly familiarized myself with the two polling team personnel as well as with the security personnel. Once the polling teams were ready with their respective EVMs, VVPATs and other required documents, we started for our journey to the two polling stations of Babukhal and Boroikhal. We initially travelled by car till Makhalbasti after which our journey by boat started. In all, 12 boats were waiting when we reached the boat station at around 9.30 am. There was rain for two days prior to the dispersal day and with the river having abundant water; our boat ride was remarkable and delightful. Suffice it to say that we were all excited and happy to be in that journey with a majestic and elegant river in the backdrop.

Halfway through the journey, the teams separated for their separate journey and I, to begin with, travelled with the team heading for Babukhal Polling Station. We reached Babukhal at around 10.45 am. After a brief chat with the polling personnel on various aspects of poll duties which we all have been trained to perform, I along with my security team started for our journey to Boroikhal Polling Station. We reached Boroikhal at around 3.00 pm in the evening. The polling personnel were making various arrangements for the poll day and I also participated along with them. One shortfall was the lack of communication and network facilities. This was true for both the polling stations. However, it is to the credit of the police department that they have managed to set up wireless network for communication. It is also to the credit of MSPDCL, Jiribam that in such a difficult terrain the corporation have managed to provide generator for round the clock power supply.

I stayed at Boroikhal Polling station for the day and the next day we all got up early and by 5.30 am the set up of the polling station as well as EVM and VVPAT was completed satisfactorily. The Babukhal team also informed that they were ready for smooth conduct of the polling process. Two Polling Agents turned up for Boroikhal Polling Station and after completion of the Mock Poll process, normal Poll started at 7.00 am. The poll process went on smoothly; the electors exercised their voting rights in a free, fair and peaceful manner. The polling officials also performed outstandingly well. Being satisfied by the way poll was progressing in Boroikhal, I along with my security team left for Babukhal. It was the same scene at Babukhal and I am proud and satisfied with the way the two polling teams have performed and also with the maturity shown by the electors of these two polling stations.

The poll ended at 4.00 pm and after checking that all the necessary documents and materials have been accounted for, we started our journey back to the receiving centre at DC Office, Jiribam. We met with the team from Boroikhal at around 7.40 pm and together we reached the receiving centre at around 8.50 pm. After submission of all required materials, documents and reports, we bid goodbye to one another and made way to our homes where a warm dinner was awaiting each of us. Before I finish and sign off, I would like to add that it was a wonderful experience; one to be cherished for a lifetime and my sincere thanks goes to the entire polling team for their dedication and professionalism, to the security personnel for providing a safe and secure environment and to the District Election machinery for providing this opportunity.

Thank you.
As a General Observer for the assembly by poll 2019 of 126-Chhindwara constituency, I took various steps to ensure maximum voter turnout.

Pink Rally: A unique ‘Pink Rally’ was organized in which girls and women from schools, colleges, offices, NGOs police force etc., participated. All were dressed in pink saris, pink suits, pink turbans and some even had pink umbrellas. Around 9000 girls and women participated and inspired the people of Chhindwara to vote.

Women’s football match: A football match was organized to which had two teams of girls who were going to vote for the first time. Women of all age groups were invited to watch the match and cheer on the girls with slogans, flags and boards in their hands.

Awareness of mandatory voting: A Voters’ Awareness Campaign was organized under SVEEP Plan to ensure that maximum people especially women voters reach the polling booths. Initiatives like Selfie point, Nukkad Natak, Prachar Rath etc., were some unique approaches for assembly polls as well as for Election 2019.

Marathon Race (Votathon): A marathon was organized and members of different morning clubs, gym owners, Yoga teachers, NGOs were contacted to encourage maximum participation. The event saw around 8000 runners who started the marathon by shouting ‘Vote Do’. Truly, a wakeup call for the citizens of Chhindwara.

Election Exhibition ‘Best from Waste’: Wood pieces, branches, colorful stones, plastic pieces, wires, metal pieces, hardboard, parts of different instruments – useless things such as these when come into the hands of artists turn into beautiful art pieces with their imagination and hard work!

This is exactly what happened at the Election Exhibition at Chhindwara where artists created ‘Best from Waste’.

Ideal & ‘Shandar’ Pink booth: I also made arrangements to make an Ideal Booth and a Pink Booth. In pink booth only women election workers were appointed. In the ideal booth facilities like drinking water, wheel chair, ramp, shelter and caretaker with toys for small children were provided. Citizens, media, DEO appreciated these booths.

Jalpatra: Arrangements were made to distribute ‘Jalpatra’ - a water pot of clay for birds in the parks.

On these pots a message for voting was written. This idea gave two messages to people - one for Paryavaran Samrakshan and the other for voting in election. This initiative was admired all over the city.

Dastak: Voters from urban and rural areas were approached door to door (Dastak) giving them invitation for voting. It covered old aged people, third gender and new voters.

District Administration’s efforts

1. A Rahgiri programme called ‘Holi ke rang Matdan ke Sang’ was organised on Holi- March 25, 2019. People participated in folk songs, folk dances, cultural activities, quiz etc.

2. A special fashion show called ‘Votgiri’ was organized on March 31, 2019 by IIM Udaipur to spread awareness for voters of city.

3. The administration had ingeniously fixed election milestones in certain places of city, showing the date of polling.

4. CAPF & Police forces were deployed in sensitive areas to ensure hassle free voting.
WE GOT INKED
Summary revision of Electoral Rolls: last enrolment opportunity before every election

As per the existing policy of Election Commission of India, revision of Electoral Rolls with reference to January 1st of the coming year as the qualifying date is done in all States/UTs usually in the last quarter of a year so that final publication of the electoral rolls could be made in the first week of January of the succeeding year. The revision of the electoral roll is conducted and published before January 25 of every year so that EPICs generated for new electors, especially young voters (of 18-19 years age) can be distributed to them in a ceremonial manner on the occasion of National Voters’ Day which is celebrated on January 25 every year.

1. As per this regular practice, on July 25, 2019, ECI announced the Special Summary Revision of Photo Electoral Rolls of intensive nature with reference to January 1, 2020 as qualifying date for eligible citizens throughout the country except for the poll bound states of Haryana, Jharkhand and Maharashtra. The Summary Revision of intensive nature is a pro-active mechanism of the Commission to rectify, update and purify the electoral roll with end to end verification using GIS based ERO-NET platform and a team of trained manpower. Voters Verification Programme (EVP) is another initiative of ECI in this direction specially designed in campaign mode to encourage the citizens for their volunteer participation and help authenticating their details with identified government IDs for purification of electoral roll which is the bedrock of any democratic election. The citizens are provided with both online and offline mode to verify their electoral details such as through Voter Helpline mobile application, National Voters Service Portal (NVSP) portal online or using offline mode by visiting Common Service Centres (CSC) or submitting a hard copy of the filled up forms through to Booth Level Officers and Electoral Registration Officers.

The EVP will set the tone before beginning the Special Summary Revision of Photo Electoral Rolls.

2. Election Commission of India announced the 2nd Special Summary Revision of Photo Electoral Rolls on July 11, 2019, which provides an opportunity for all the un-enrolled eligible citizens for the poll going states of Haryana and Maharashtra to register themselves. Similarly, for registration of un-enrolled eligible service personnel (Persons working in Central Forces under Arms Act and Government officials deployed in Embassies outside the country classified as Service Voters provisioned for online enrolment) in the States Haryana and Maharashtra for the impending General Elections, Election Commission of India has also announced the 2nd Special Summary Revision of last part of electoral rolls. The final electoral roll will be published on August 19, 2019 for the upcoming election in the States.

Recent Appointments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Officer</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Date of Appointment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dharmendra Sharma, IAS (AGMUT: 1988)</td>
<td>Director General, ECI</td>
<td>12.04.2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>K. Vijayanand, IAS (Andhra Pradesh: 1992)</td>
<td>CEO, Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>12.06.2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exchanging ideas for election management

A 2 member delegation led by Wafula W. Chebukarti, Chairperson from Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission of Kenya visited the Election Commission of India on May 10, 2019.

Sunil Arora, Chief Election Commissioner, Dr. Sandeep Saxena, Senior Deputy Election Commissioner and Dhirendra Ojha, Director General, visited USA from June 6-7, 2019 to attend a meeting with President & CEO, IFES to discuss further engagement and cooperation & partnership between ECI/IIIDEM and IFES under the aegis of the MoU and to have an interaction with NRI community in United States.

Ashok Lavasa, Election Commissioner, Umesh Sinha, Secretary General, ECI and Dilip Sharma, Director General visited Mauritius from June 17-20, 2019 to participate in a symposium on June 17-18, 2019, a bilateral meeting with OEC-Mauritius and interaction with Mission Officials and NRI Associations in Port Louis.
A group of 13 Egyptian Diplomats from various countries recommended by Foreign Service Institute of MEA visited Election Commission of India on June 18, 2019 for a briefing on ‘The Conduct of Elections in Largest Democracy in the World’.

An 8 member delegation from Vietnam’s National Assembly led by H.E. Tran Van Tuy, Member of Central Party Committee & Head of the National Assembly’s Commission for Deputy Affairs visited Election Commission of India on June 25, 2019.

Sushil Chandra, Election Commissioner and Vikram Batra, Director visited Kazakhstan from June 7-11, 2019 to participate as International Election Observers during the Election of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.
A group of 40 Foreign Diplomats from five Central Asian Countries and Maldives recommended by Foreign Service Institute MEA visited Election Commission of India on June 26, 2019 for a briefing on ‘The Role & Functions of ECI and the Best Practices in this Regard’.

A 4 Member delegation from Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB) visited the Commission on July 4, 2019 to discuss the preparing activities for the 4th General Assembly of A-WEB to be hosted by Election Commission of India.

A Group of 15-Parliamentary Officials from Cambodian Senate visited the Election Commission of India on July 17, 2019 for a briefing on ‘How Elections are Conducted in India and the Best Practices in this Regard’.

Sushil Chandra, Election Commissioner, Umesh Sinha, Secretary General, ECI along with A. Mona Sreenivas, Director visited United Kingdom from July 23-27, 2019 to participate in the 18th Cambridge Conference on ‘Electoral Democracy’ at Cambridge, UK.
My Vote Matters

Vol I Issue 2

The second issue of ‘My Vote Matters’, a quarterly magazine of the Election Commission of India was released by the Commission during the ‘Briefing of Foreign Delegates during International Election Visitors Program for General Election to Lok Sabha 2019’ held on May 11, 2019. This issue provides a holistic overview of the Lok Sabha Elections 2019 in action with the world’s largest democratic exercise having started in full swing.

This publication provided an overview of the various kinds of interventions being undertaken across the country in various states. New ventures, interventions and perspectives of subject matter experts on various facets of the electoral processes of India were covered extensively.

Covering a host of topics such as Electoral Roll Management, Voter Helplines, SVEEP, National Multi-media campaign, Poll Day Preparation, EVM & VVPAT; this issue of My Vote Matters gives the reader a comprehensive understanding of the gargantuan task of undertaking the world’s largest democratic exercise.

VoICE International

Vol III Special Issue No. 1 & 2

This issue of VoICE International highlighted the experiences of different EMBs on ‘Voter Education for Informed and Ethical Voting’. Different EMBs have shaped up their systems for informed and ethical voting because investing in the health of democracy is of utmost importance.

The theme of this issue essentially focuses on how to empower voters through information, awareness and motivation for participation besides enabling a voter to appreciate the significance and relevance of ethical voting. Effective voter education empowers an elector to take informed, considered and confident ballot decisions.

This issue further brings to the reader interesting snippets, election updates, international events and announcements from different EMBs and International Institutions. Furthermore, EMBs of BiH, Georgia, Fiji, Kazakhstan, Maldives, India besides International IDEA share rich experiences on the subject besides a paper on good practices from Russia in this issue.
Snapshots of Lok Sabha 2019

The Election Commission of India launched a national multi-media campaign to supplement the state and district campaigns to spread awareness on the process and significance of electoral participation and motivate voters to come forward and take part in the world’s largest democracy exercise. The campaign covered important topics like registration, facilitation, accessibility, EVM & VVPAT, use of technology in the electoral process besides ethical and informed voting.

Keeping the citizens in general and targeting youth, women, first-time voters and persons with disabilities, Desh Ka Maha Tyohar was adopted as the overarching thought and was the common thread in most of the communication pieces, whether in TV and Cinema Commercials, Print Ads, Posters, Online etc. There were many sub-campaigns such as #GoRegister, #GoVerify, #GoVote tackling specific communication challenges/objectives.

The vibrancy of the overall campaign was seen across the traditional media as well as newer media vehicles including social media; mobile media in the forms of train coach branding and metro train overall wraps and inside branding.

101 Innovations & Initiatives

Under the Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation program, various novel practices were adopted by States/UTs across the country to conduct free and fair Elections to the Lok Sabha in 2019. All the good practices aligned with the pursuit of Election Commission of India’s motto of ‘No Voter to be Left Behind’.

The interventions (general as well as targeted), were designed according to the socio-economic, cultural, linguistic and demographic profile of the state as well as the history of electoral participation in previous rounds of elections.

This book contains the account of all those exemplary innovations & initiatives which contributed in the free & fair, voter friendly, accessible, inclusive and festive elections. It is a matter of great satisfaction that over 600 million voters cast their votes in these elections resulting in the highest ever voter turnout of 67.47% as well as the lowest gender gap of 0.1%.

This book was dedicated to all the unsung heroes who played the instrumental part in the successful conduct of the election and upheld the basic tenets of democracy.
During the General Election of 2019, special importance was given to impart in-depth and systematic knowledge about all aspects of the election process through a series of Handbooks, Compendiums and Manuals.

These publications provided elaborate information on topics like duties and responsibilities of Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, Observers and Manuals on the working of Electronic Voting Machines and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail.

There were dedicated Compendiums elaborating instructions on election expenditure monitoring and instructions on matters relating to media and its related issues. There were also dedicated handbooks on the conduct of Polling and Counting Agents.
Join the Largest Voter's Verification Drive
1st September – 15th October, 2019

Check, authenticate and verify your and your family's details in your EPIC for a 100% Error Free Electoral Roll in just five easy steps:

**Step 1.** Log on to www.nvsp.in with your EPIC Number

**Step 2.** Verify your Name, DOB, Gender, Relation Type/Name, Address and Photo

**Step 3.** In case of errors or change in your details/photograph, mention the correct information

**Step 4.** Upload any one ID proof

**Step 5.** Submit your Mobile Number and email for further services

**BENEFITS:**
- Permanent Log in facility for Registered voters
- Regular SMS based information/alerts
- Personalized contact with BLOs/EROs
- No deletion without your permission
- During election, all election related information will be sent on your mobile/email
- Family living together will be grouped at one polling station.

For More Details:

Visit www.nvsp.in

Download 'Voter Helpline' Android App

Call Helpline 1950

Visit ERO Office
NO PLACE TOO REMOTE
NO DUTY TOO TOUGH
EVERY VOTE MATTERS
AND WE WILL MAKE IT COUNT