



CURRENT AFFAIRS



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NAVIGATING THE SILVER YEARS

THIS ARTICLE COVERS 'DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS' AND THE TOPIC DETAILS OF "SENIOR CARE REFORMS IN INDIA: REIMAGINING THE SENIOR CARE PARADIGM: A POSITION PAPER". THIS TOPIC IS RELEVANT IN THE "SOCIAL ISSUES AND SOCIAL JUSTICE" SECTION OF THE UPSC CSE EXAM.

WHY IN THE NEWS?

NITI Aayog recently published a research titled "Senior Care Reforms in India: Reimagining the Senior Care Paradigm: A Position Paper."

KEY FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

- **Exponential Growth in elderly people:** The elderly population in India currently constitutes around 10% of the total population, translating to roughly 104 million individuals. This figure is projected to nearly double, reaching 19.5% by 2050, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).
- **Policy Gap:** The absence of a comprehensive national policy for senior care creates significant gaps in infrastructure, trained professionals, and readily available knowledge for managing age-related illnesses. It also hinders the development of effective monitoring mechanisms and emergency response systems, crucial for ensuring the well-being of the elderly.
- **Rural-Urban Divide:** A stark disparity exists in the distribution of the elderly population, with 71% residing in rural areas. This presents unique challenges for access to quality healthcare facilities, which are often concentrated in urban centres.
- **Shifting Health Landscape:** The transition from high to low mortality rates has resulted in a significant shift in disease burden towards the older population. This translates to a rise in chronic illnesses like heart disease, diabetes, and dementia, requiring specialized healthcare services and infrastructure.

CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS:

- **Strained Social Support Systems:** The rising dependency ratio, as the working-age population shrinks relative to the elderly, puts a strain on traditional family support systems. This may necessitate alternative care models and social security programs to cater to the needs of the elderly population.
- **Evolving Family Structures:** The changing family dynamics, with smaller nuclear families becoming more prevalent, may not always be equipped to provide the necessary level of care and

support for their elderly members. This necessitates exploring alternative models of caregiving and promoting intergenerational solidarity.

- **Mental Health Concerns:** A significant portion of the elderly population, estimated to be around 20%, grapple with mental health issues like depression and anxiety. Addressing these concerns requires expanding access to mental healthcare services and promoting mental health awareness among the elderly and their caregivers.
- **Economic Considerations:** The growing elderly population has significant economic implications, leading to potential challenges in the labour market and a rise in healthcare expenditure. As individuals age, their medical needs often increase, potentially straining healthcare resources and public finances.

A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO EMPOWERING INDIA'S ELDERLY: KEY INTERVENTIONS

The report proposes a multifaceted approach to empowering and supporting India's growing elderly population. It identifies four core areas for intervention: health, social, economic/financial, and digital.

HEALTH:

1. **Empowering Seniors and Caregivers:** Promoting health literacy among both the elderly and their caregivers is crucial. This will involve strengthening geriatric healthcare within the existing system and creating special provisions for senior citizens.
2. **Enhancing Healthcare Access:** Expanding access to Ayushman Bharat centres, strengthening geriatric healthcare infrastructure, increasing tele-consultation services, and upskilling the healthcare workforce are vital steps towards ensuring comprehensive primary healthcare for the elderly.

SOCIAL:

1. **Combating Stigma and Building Support:** Raising awareness about the challenges faced by the elderly within the wider community is essential. This can be achieved through campaigns and the creation of peer support groups.
2. **Legal and Regulatory Safeguards:** Empowering seniors also involves raising awareness about existing legal protections, promoting existing welfare schemes, and advocating for legal reforms like strengthening the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL:

1. **Reskilling and Financial Security:** Upskilling opportunities for the elderly can improve their employability. Additionally, increasing public pension coverage, providing infrastructure for financial security, and encouraging mandatory savings plans for those who can afford them are crucial steps.
2. **Financial Ease and Protection:** Exploring reverse mortgage options to increase liquidity for seniors, reforming GST on senior care products to make them more affordable, and encouraging the private sector to develop dedicated geriatric health insurance products are necessary measures.

DIGITAL INCLUSION:

1. **Bridging the Digital Divide:** Making digital devices affordable and accessible, promoting digital literacy among seniors, and harnessing the potential of technology to connect them with essential services are crucial steps towards digital inclusion.

UNLOCKING THE “SILVER ECONOMY”:

1. **Enhancing Senior Participation:** Currently, only a small percentage of seniors work. The report recommends government initiatives to boost the “silver economy,” which caters to the unique needs and demands of the elderly. This could involve creating suitable work opportunities that allow seniors to leverage their experience and expertise in various sectors.

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE ELDERLY POPULATION

- **Healthcare Accessibility:** Elderly individuals, particularly in rural areas, face obstacles in accessing healthcare, compounded by shortages of professionals, resulting in inadequate medical attention.
- **Chronic Diseases and Mental Health:** A substantial portion of the elderly contend with chronic diseases, straining the healthcare system. Mental health issues, often overlooked, significantly impact the overall well-being of the elderly.
- **Dependency Ratios and Altered Family Structures:** Population ageing alters family dynamics, increasing dependency ratios and necessitating alternative care solutions due to evolving family support systems.
- **Financial Strain:** Higher medical expenses for the elderly strain financial resources, especially with increased healthcare needs, posing a significant economic challenge.
- **Social Isolation and Life Satisfaction:** Changing societal structures contribute to social isolation, negatively affecting the mental well-being of the elderly. A significant percentage reports low life satisfaction, emphasizing the need for addressing social and emotional needs.

PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q1. Consider the following statements

1. Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana focuses on providing physical aids and assisted living devices to senior citizens below the poverty line
2. Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana provides financial assistance to senior citizens below the poverty line

Which of the following statements above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

ANSWER: C

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q1. Explore the impact of social isolation and loneliness on the mental well-being of senior citizens. What measures can be taken to address and alleviate this issue?

Himanshu Mishra

CURRENT RELEVANCE OF ELECTORAL SYSTEM REFORMS IN INDIA

SOURCE – THE HINDU AND PIB.

GENERAL STUDIES – POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE OF INDIA, SUPREME COURT, ELECTION COMMISSION, CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER OF INDIA, CURRENT RELEVANCE OF ELECTORAL REFORMS, ONE NATION ONE ELECTION, COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS RELATED TO ELECTORAL REFORMS IN INDIA.

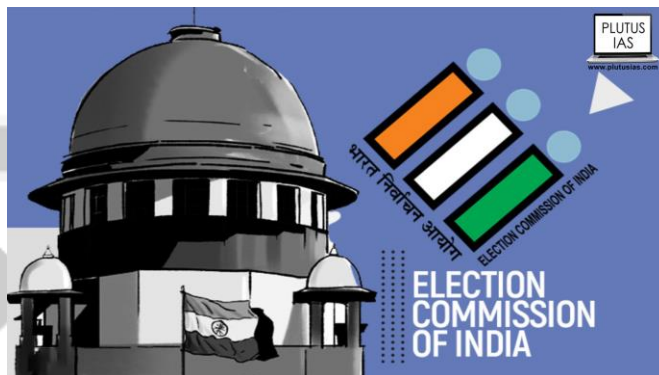
WHY IN THE NEWS ?



- Recently, on one hand, there is a heated market of debates on the need of 'One Nation – One Election' in India by various political parties in India, on the other hand, in the case of Chandigarh Mayor election, the Supreme Court of India has decided to hold the elections on February 20, 2024. The judgment delivered by the Chief Justice of India, D.Y. Chandrachud has again brought the concept of electoral reforms under the spotlight of the fair and free electoral system in India.
- The Supreme Court of India overturned the results of the Chandigarh Mayor election on 20 February 2024 and declared AAP-Congress alliance candidate Kuldeep Kumar as the new Mayor of Chandigarh city. Additionally, the Supreme Court of India has ordered the prosecution of the election returning officer, Anil Masih, a BJP leader, for misconduct after finding serious lapses in the conduct of the January 30 mayoral election. Has also given.
- A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud and Justice J.B. A division bench of Pardiwala and Manoj Mishra on January 30 initiated proceedings against Anil Masih, the returning officer who presided over the controversial mayoral elections, whose "defacement" of eight ballot papers in the Chandigarh mayoral elections was caught on security cameras.
- The "underhanded" conduct of Returning Officer Anil Masih had tilted the election results in favor of BJP's Manoj Sonkar. The Supreme Court of India intervened on 5 February to seize ballot papers and video records of the voting day.

- The Supreme Court of India has considered conducting a free and fair election process in India as a part of the basic structure of the Indian Constitution.
- The Supreme Court of India in the case of Kuldeep Kumar v. Union Territory of Chandigarh and Others (also known as the Chandigarh Mayor's Election case) stated that –**"Elections at the local participatory level in India act as a microcosm of the largest democratic structure in the country. Therefore, ensuring a free and fair electoral process throughout the process is essential to maintaining the legitimacy of and trust in representative democracy."**

IMPORTANT REASONS FOR THE NEED TO REFORM THE ELECTION PROCESS IN INDIA AT PRESENT :



There is a need for electoral reforms in India because the present electoral system has some important shortcomings which are as follows –

1. **Political pressure** : Due to political pressure in the electoral process, election officials have to be unduly influenced, due to which they are not able to maintain complete integrity and impartiality in their work.
2. **Misuse of government machinery** : In India Misuse of government machinery by ruling parties has become common in elections, leading to lack of fairness in the election process.
3. **Incompleteness of voter list** : Due to incompleteness of voter list before the elections, many citizens are not able to fully exercise their franchise, which leads to lack of fairness in the election process.
4. **Problem of independent candidates** : Due to the majority of independent candidates in the electoral process, they are facing many challenges in casting votes.
5. **Occurrence of fake and fraudulent voting during elections** : The increasing trend of fake and bogus voting is affecting the election process, leading to loss of fairness.
6. **Lack of electoral infrastructure in India** : There is lack of adequate arrangements in the infrastructure before the elections, which is hindering the Election Commission from conducting its functions properly.
7. **Ensuring security of opposition parties during elections** : There is a need for electoral reforms to ensure security of opposition party candidates against the ruling parties so as to maintain balance in the electoral process inherent in the political process of India.
8. **Digitization and technological improvements** : Through digitalization and technological improvements in the election process, the election process can be made more fair, free, secure and comfortable.

Through these reforms, the election process in India will be secured, Streamlined, Efforts can be made to maintain it impartially, and in accordance with the needs of the public.

FACTORS AFFECTING FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS IN INDIA :



1. **candidates' own criminal Record** : Majority of the candidates in India do not provide information regarding their transparency and criminal records, making candidate selection difficult.
2. **Increasing role of money during elections in India** : Often during elections in India, due to day by day increase in election expenditure, common citizens are being kept away from the voting process as it is not possible to challenge very rich candidates during elections.
3. **Increasing use of muscle power** : During elections in India, most candidates and their associated political parties resort to muscle power, which may include violence, intimidation, and booth capturing, to win elections.
4. **Increasing prevalence of criminal politics** : Criminal persons get the opportunity to enter politics, where they try to get their cases closed or avoid proceedings.
5. **Casteism and communal politics** : Selection based on casteism and communal trends increases diversity and inequality in the society, which can weaken the sense of fairness.
6. **Fielding of independent candidates** : Against strong candidates, rival parties field independent candidates on a large scale, allowing them to cut into their votes.
7. **Communalism and religious fundamentalism** : In post-independence politics in India, communalism and religious fundamentalism have fueled political movements and threatened India's pluralistic social ideology. The process of voting on the basis of communalism and religious fundamentalism has started. Due to which the free and fair election process in India has been affected.

Taking all these factors together, there is a need to improve the process of free and fair elections in India so that Indian citizens get the opportunity to make a true and effective choice during the election process.

COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS RELATED TO ELECTORAL REFORMS IN INDIA:



1. **Tarkunde Committee (1974-75)** : This committee submitted its report and examined various aspects to improve the electoral system.
2. **Dinesh Goswami Committee on Electoral Reforms (year 1990)** : This committee gave suggestions towards election reforms and pointed out the need for special changes in the election process.
3. **Vohra Committee on Criminalization of Politics (1993)** : This committee investigated political crimes and their causes and made suggestions for improving the electoral process.
4. **Indrajit Gupta Committee on State Financing in Elections (1998)** : This committee examined issues related to financing of elections and suggested reforms.
5. **Law Commission Report on Electoral Reforms (1999)** : This commission presented its report on electoral reforms and recommended new electoral rules.
6. **Election Commission Report on Electoral Reforms (2004)** : Through this report, the Election Commission discussed the need for electoral reforms and recommended new technical measures.
7. **Veerappa Moily Committee on Ethics in Governance (2007)** : This committee investigated ethics in governance and made suggestions on the integrity and morality of political leaders.
8. **Salary Committee on Electoral Laws and Electoral Reforms (Year 2010)** : This committee made suggestions in the area of electoral reforms regarding salaries and honoring of constituency employees.

Based on the suggestions of the above committees and commissions in India, various election reform programs have been initiated at different times which have played an important role in keeping the election system and its related machinery secure, fair, and transparent in India.

ELECTION REFORMS IN INDIA BEFORE THE YEAR 2000 :

- Indian Constitution **61st Constitutional Amendment Act, 1989** Under this, the voting age was raised to 18 years.
- Electoral officers began to be considered on deputation to the Election Commission during the election period.
- The number of nomination papers was increased by 10 percent.
- He was banned from contesting elections for 6 years for insulting the National Honor Act, 1971.
- A restriction of not contesting elections from more than two constituencies was imposed.

ELECTION REFORMS IN INDIA AFTER THE YEAR 2000 :



- For the first time, the use of the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) came into use in the elections held in India in the period after the year 2000, the purpose of which was to keep the Indian electoral process safe and accurate.
- The EVM was developed in collaboration with the public sector undertakings Bharat Electronics Limited (Bangalore) and Electronics Corporation of India Limited (Hyderabad).
- In December 1988, Parliament amended the law and gave the right to use EVMs.
- EVM was used for the first time in 1998 in the elections of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi.
- In India, in the year 1999, EVMs were used in the entire state in the Goa Assembly elections.

In India, after the year 2000, important reforms were made to the Indian electoral system by incorporating various aspects related to electoral reforms. Which are as follows –

BAN ON EXIT POLL :

- The Central Election Commission in India has banned exit polls conducted by various media groups or newspaper groups during the election process from the beginning of voting till half an hour after the end of voting.
- An attempt is being made to make the election process just and fair by banning exit polls during the election process in India.

IMPOSING CEILING ON ELECTION EXPENSES OF CANDIDATES :

- In India, election expenditure limits have been set for Lok Sabha seats so that there is fair competition among the candidates.
- This limit on election expenditure in India is different for big and small states so that all the candidates get equal opportunity and the electoral process in different states can be conducted justly, freely and fairly.

VOTING THROUGH POSTAL BALLOT :

- In India, government employees and all serving soldiers of the Indian Army and all types of paramilitary forces or other personnel are allowed to vote through postal ballot.
- Indian citizens living abroad also have the right to this process of voting through postal ballot.

SPREADING AWARENESS ABOUT VOTING AMONG THE PUBLIC BY THE ELECTION COMMISSION :

- Election Commission in India 25 January is celebrated every year as National Voters' Day so that young voters can participate in the electoral process.
- It is mandatory for all political parties in India to provide information about election donations received during elections to the Election Commission.

USE OF NOTA IN ELECTIONS :

- In elections in India The system of using NOTA option has been implemented since the year 2013, which gives the voter of India the option of not voting in favor of any candidate.

AUDIT TRAIL OF VOTER INSPECTION PAPER :

- Through this system called Voter Inspection Paper Audit Trail in India, voters can verify their vote and get information in favor of the candidate.
- Under this process in India, video recording of the voting process is also done.

USE OF VARIOUS MODERN TECHNOLOGIES IN ELECTIONS :

- In India, effective steps have been taken to prevent fraudulent and duplicate entries or voting through creation of a computerized database of electors and technological improvements.
- During the election, the online communication system Komet is used to monitor and secure each polling station on election day.
- Real-time monitoring of polling stations is being done using GPS technology during general elections in India.

Through these procedural reforms, efforts are being made to promote freedom, fairness, and impartiality in elections in a procedural manner towards electoral reforms in India.

CRITICISM OF INDIAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM :



In India, many criticisms are being raised regarding the method of electing public representatives through the first past the post method. Some important flaws in this method of election process are as follows –

CRITICISM OF VOTING POSSIBILITIES AND REPRESENTATION SYSTEM :

- In this method of the current election process in India, the candidate receiving the highest number of votes in a seat wins the election, which may result in a political party being divided among different groups but not being represented in the seat. This may increase inequality in the situation of collective justice.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONAL VICTORY AND POLITICAL PARTY MEMBERS :

- During elections in India It has been seen many times that despite a party getting the highest number of votes, not even a single member of it gets a seat. Due to this, the principle of individual victory and mutual relations between political parties may be in danger.

IGNORING MAJORITY OR MINORITY AND COMMUNITY SECTIONS :

- Despite political parties getting votes in the general elections held in India, it has been observed that the voices of some groups may remain unheard in the House. Due to this, majority or sometimes minority sections or community sections are not represented and their issues do not receive attention in the House. it is also seen as ignoring the majority or minority and community sections.

CONCLUSION/ WAY FORWARD :



NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT IN ELECTORAL PROCESS :

- Currently being adopted in India, There is an urgent need to reform the electoral process so that representation can be more efficient and the situation of collective justice can be improved.

BANNING RELIGIOUS SLOGANS BASED ON RELIGION AND VISITING RELIGIOUS PLACES IN ELECTIONS :

- During elections in India, leaders of political parties should be banned from visiting religious places and raising religious slogans during election campaigns so that the electoral process in India can be conducted in a fair and free manner.

STRICTNESS AGAINST FAKE NEWS OR PAID NEWS :

- Under the electoral reforms in India, paid news and fake news adopted by political parties during elections should be strictly banned so that the public opinion can get correct and reliable information during the elections and the elections can be conducted in a transparent and fair manner.

REGULATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS :

- During elections in India, a code of conduct should be implemented to monitor the quality of news released on social media and to stop the spread of misinformation, so that the elections can be conducted transparently and fairly.

TO DRAW ATTENTION TOWARDS DISCUSSION ON THE ISSUE OF 'ONE NATION ONE ELECTION' :

- To hold discussions among various groups towards electoral reforms in India. '**One Nation One Election**' Widespread discussions should be held on the issue so that support from all groups can be obtained.

Through these procedural reforms, we can ensure that the electoral process in India is fair, efficient and collectively fair, thereby strengthening the core objective of Indian democracy and making significant improvements in India's electoral system possible.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS FOR PRELIMINARY EXAM :

Q.1. Consider the following statements regarding electoral reforms in India.

1. In India, due to political pressure, election officials have to be unduly influenced, due to which they are not able to maintain complete integrity and impartiality in their work.
2. Vohra Committee formed in the year 1993 during the elections in India Suggested improvements in the electoral process by investigating political crimes and their causes.
3. In India, the method of electing public representatives through the first past the post method has been adopted.
4. In India, there is a restriction of not contesting elections from more than two constituencies.

Which of the above statement / statements is/are correct ?

- (A) Only 1 and 4
- (B) Only 1 and 3
- (C) None of these.
- (D) All of these.

Answer - (D)

PRACTICE QUESTIONS FOR MAIN EXAM :

Q.1. Discuss in detail the current relevance of reforming the electoral process in India by highlighting the inherent flaws in the current electoral process of India.