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THE GROUND-LEVEL CHALLENGES OF POLLING PARTIES IN ELECTIONS

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Abstract

Since the elections have started in independent India, many reforms related to elections have been done till now. If we talk about electoral reforms, Voter I.D. Card started. The Voting age in India was reduced from 21 to 18 years, Electronic voting machines being used in elections. The traditions of submitting people's licensed weapons at the nearest police station were started so that peaceful elections could be held. The Election commission banned the sale of liquor on the day of polling. Arrangements were also made to ensure that money is not spent superfluously on election campaign. In order to make the election transparent, the election commission has issued an order that every contesting candidate should fill his election nomination form, along with the affidavit detailing total liabilities of one's spouse and dependents, details of education and qualifications and any criminal background, if any, and details of criminal cases filed against one. And arrangements were made to have the voter list with the photograph. All these reforms have been done by the Election Commission till now. Polling Party plays a pivotal role in conducting elections. The job of the polling party is to conduct elections. When the polling party performs its duties, it has to face many difficulties and challenges. The present paper discusses the challenges of polling

party at the ground level and will try to suggest some remedies.

Keywords: Ground-level, Challenges, Elections, India

Introduction

The present paper entitled "The Ground-level Challenges of Polling parties in Elections" is a humble academic attempt to highlight the ordeal of the polling parties before, during and after the polling. At the beginning of this paper, it is germane to express the collective of the polling parties experience regarding the government job, the experience tells that in government job, the employees work with the sincerity in only two conditions: - either when the government employee loves his work or when he is doing election duty, because the employee knows that if he does any carelessness here, he will have to pay the price either by suspension or by dismissal. The entire staff puts their full strength for the successful and near smooth conduct of the election. And that is now till date in Independent India have been held on the strength of government employees. There is also a flipside which are being rectified continuously.

Ever Chhattisgarh since the elections have been started in independent India, many reforms related to elections have been done till now. If we

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talk about electoral reforms, Voter I.D. Card started. the Voting age in India was reduced from 21 to 18 years, Electronic Voting Machines are being used in elections. The traditions of submitting people's licensed weapons at the nearest police station were started so that peaceful elections could be held. The Election commission banned the sale of liquor on the day of polling. Arrangements were also made to ensure that money is not spent superfluously on election campaign. In order to make the election transparent, the election commission has issued an order that every contesting candidate should fill his election nomination form, along with the affidavit detailing total liabilities of one's spouse and dependents, details of education and qualifications and any criminal background, if any, and details of criminal cases filed against one. And arrangements were made to have the voter list with the photograph.

All these reforms have been done by the Election Commission till now. Polling Party plays a pivotal role in conducting elections. The job of the polling party is to conduct elections. When the polling party performs its duties, it has to face many difficulties and challenges. So, the paper discusses first the tasks of the polling party thereafter about the problems being faced by the polling party. At the end, there would be suggestions and conclusions.

Regarding the rigor of the election duty, it is humorously said that 'if you have done polling party duty then you can do anything in the world' and perhaps due to the rigor of polling duty, many people do not want to do election duty. This is a high time to record the problems being faced by the polling party and hence this research paper deliberates the major related issues.

Research Methodology: - Primary Source for data collection and 100 interviews through questionnaire.

Research Area: -

Abhanpur block of Raipur District Chhattisgarh is the research area. Interviewed employees who had experience of election duty.

Research Objectives: -

To make the polling work easier for the polling party by studying the problems faced by the polling party in the polling process.

Research Hypothesis: -

- (1) The polling party has to face many difficulties in conducting the poll work.
- (2) There is a need to simplify the polling work for the polling party.

Introduction of the Polling Party: -

Polling parties are formed to conduct elections in each polling station. The presiding officer is the head of the polling party. There may be three or four polling officers under the presiding officer. The polling party may consist of 4-5 people. In addition, there are security personnel as well the number of security personnel depending on the sensitivity of the polling station.

Functions of the Polling Party: -

- (1) The polling party is given the necessary training before the poll work. Having gone through the training, the polling party gets polling material on reaching the place fixed by the election commission. It is then verified and delivered to the polling officials at the designated polling station.
- (2) After reaching the polling station, preparing the entire booth, according to the code of conduct the entire work of conducting elections is done by the polling party.
- (3) It is the job of the polling party to take full care of the work of polling in the polling station, according to the polling rules.



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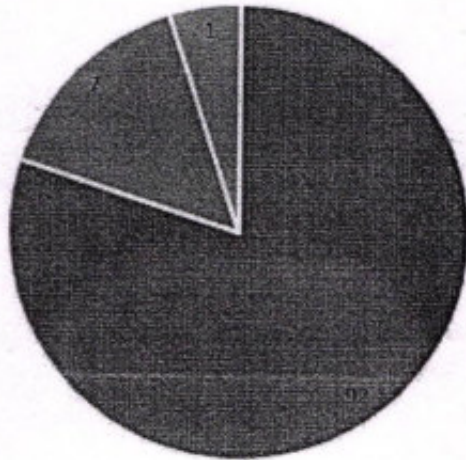
- (4) After the voting, all the materials are sealed. It is the job of the polling party to fill all the formats related to the voting and submit them.

Challenges for Polling Party: -

The challenges that the polling party have to face in conducting the poll work.

The First Challenge: -The first challenge out of that is 'work overload'. To understand the challenge of 'work overload', the respondents were asked a related question, out of which the question is as follows: -

Question-1. Does the polling party have to face the problem of 'work overload' in conducting the poll work?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Cannot say ■

Response

In the response of this question, 92% of respondents accepted that polling party face the problem of 'work overload' and 7% of respondent did not accept, 1% said, cannot say.

'Work overload' simply means that people usually work for 8 hours a day. Timing is from

10.00am to 5.00pm, but the election duty is of nearly 48-60 hours, continuously facing difficult situation tirelessly. And one has to compromise on eating, drinking and sleeping. Here is another reason for work overload, that is the number of voters is on an average 1000. Getting 1000 voters to vote in one booth is a very difficult task. The large number of voters and the lack of adequate food, drink and accommodation makes people tired. Due to fatigue, even small tasks seem difficult to the polling party. Thus, we can say that work overload in polling comes out as the biggest problem for the party.

Suggestions: -

By creating more polling stations: A polling station has up to 1000 voters in State Legislative Assembly Election and Lok Sabha elections. Having up to 1000 voters has to face problems for both the voters and the polling party. Due to large number of voters, the polling work is not completed in time. Many voters have to face long queues. When they come to vote and this also puts a lot of pressure on the polling station. To tackle such a problem the number of polling station should be increased. Keeping more than 500-600 voters in a polling station makes the work of the polling party difficult. Since the polling station where there are 500-600 voters, the work of that polling station gets completed on time. The election commission can also depute the private school teacher aided to meet the shortage of staff. And also, we can increase more stages for election. Number of 'Pink Booth' must be increased.

The Second Challenge: - The second challenge that the polling party faces at the polling station is 'The Beep sound'. Respondents were asked a related question which is as follows.

Question-2. Whether can 'The Beep Sound' that comes after voting in the Electronic Voting

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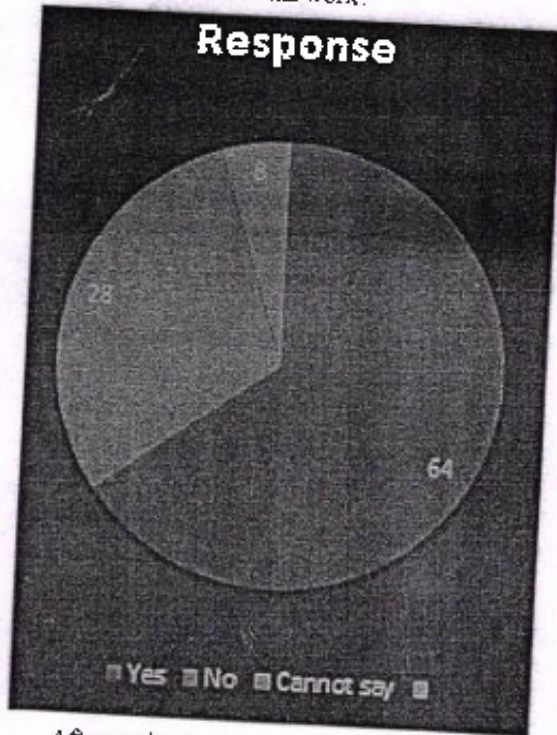
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Machine cause trouble for the Polling Officer Number-3 who supervises it, may be confused by hearing the beep sound again and again and he may make mistake in his work?



After voting in the electronic voting machine the beep sound coming after voting is monitored by the polling officer number-3 in the polling party. There may be a mistake in monitoring it. This was accepted by 64% of the respondents and 28% of the respondents said that there cannot be a mistake and 8% of the respondents said, cannot say.

The beep sound is heard in the polling station when voting from the EVM. And voter sees his/her vote in the front screen. But the problem arises for the polling party when the repeated sound of 'Beep' can be irritating and cause confusion and many times the voter comes out of the polling station without casting his vote. If the Polling

Officer-3 takes notice here, then those voters are called back and cast their votes and if polling officer-3 does not notice, then that vote is not cast. In such a situation it is difficult to identify the voter who did not vote. This type of problem is often faced by the polling party. Polling Officer Number -3 is most likely to be confused by the "Sound of the Beep" when there are around 1000 voters in the polling station means there are too many voters and there is a long line to vote. The chances of error due to the "Sound of the Beep" are less in the early hours of voting and more in the afternoon and evening as the crowd is more at this time. If the voter is 500-600 then there is less chance of making mistake of polling officer number-3 because the work load is less and the work is smoother due to not excessive voter turnout. Such problems are more common as voters are not EVM friendly. Illiterate and very elderly voters may be the people who unknowingly and unintentionally cause this problem.

Suggestions: -

The best way to avoid disturbance caused by 'Beep Sound' can be that additional polling officers has a printer who after casting the vote prints 'The Voting has Completed' in two copies of which the additional polling officers should keep one copy with himself/herself and give one copy to the voter. Also, them should have a register in which the voter should sign to get the printed slip of voting. Along with this, the EVM machine should also be publicized among the people.

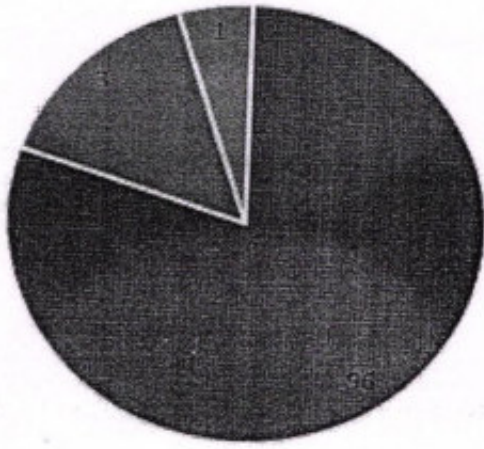
The Third Challenge: -

The third challenge before the polling party is to carry the polling materials along with their belongings. Respondents were asked a question related to this challenge which is as follows.



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Response



■ Yes ■ No ■ Cannot say ■

Question-3. Does the polling party face any difficulty in carrying the polling material along with their belongings?

In answer to this question 96% of the respondents said 'Yes', 3% of respondents said 'No' and 1% of the respondents said, cannot say.

When the polling party reaches the polling duty, each polling officer carries a bag with 4 days' worth preparation. Along with this, they also have to carry the voting materials for conducting the vote. In which the set of Electronic Voting Machine i.e., Ballot Unit, Control Unit and VVPAT along other voting material are also there. The polling party has to carry these items along with their belongings. It is very hard work. There is where the fatigue in polling duty begins.

Suggestions: -

The common election material should be delivered to the polling party at the polling station so that the polling party does not have the extra burden. The election material should also be delivered to the polling station after the arrival of

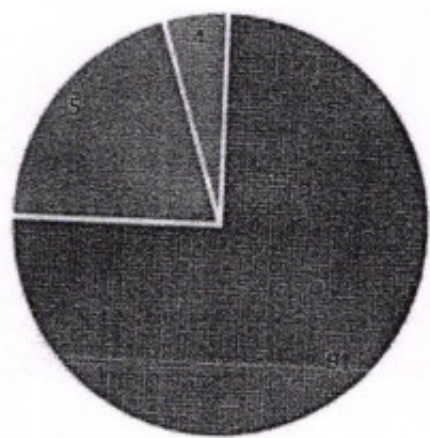
the polling party. After the material reaches the polling station if there is any shortage in the material, then it can be called for by informing the sector officer, other arrangements may be to employ assistants to bring and carry the polling materials.

The Fourth Challenge: -

The fourth challenge is the stay-accommodation of women polling officers in front of the polling party. The respondents were asked related question which is as follows.

Question-4. Do the women polling officers who are in the polling party find it difficult to stay with male officers of polling party?

Response



■ Yes ■ No ■ Cannot say ■

In response to this question, 91% of the respondents accepted that women have to face the difficulties to stay in the polling station. 5% of the respondents said No in their reply. 4% of the respondents answered cannot say.

Women also have duty in the polling party and the arrangements for their stay in the booth where the duty is engaged are along with men. In some polling stations, women stay in the extra room when there is an extra room. But if additional

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room is not available then one has to stay in the same polling station. As such, their privacy is disturbed. Men and women are not able to feel comfortable staying in one place together. It is often seen that there is no proper arrangement for the stay of the polling party.

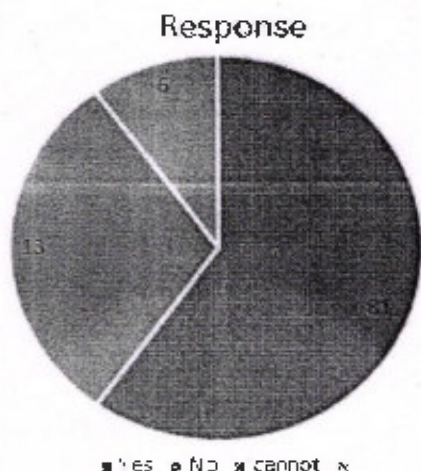
Suggestions: -

Adequate rooms should be provided for the accommodation of women and men of the polling party keeping in view their privacy. And polling stations should be made in such buildings where additional room is available.

The Fifth Challenge: -

The fifth challenge is voting of Divyang people who are disabled. The respondents were asked related question which is as follows.

Question-5 Should the Divyang voters bring with them the declaration form signed by their partner in advance so that there is no unnecessary delay in casting their vote at the polling station?



In response to this question 81% of the respondents accepted that one of the reasons for unnecessary delay is not filling the declaration form. 13% of the respondents answered No and 6% respondent said cannot say.

The Divyang voters need a companion to vote and such people are also required to fill declaration form. Generally, many persons with disabilities come to the polling station and search for their partner and fill the form which causes unnecessary delay.

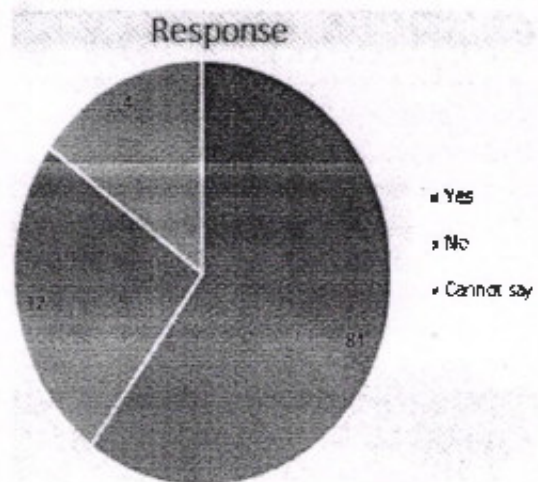
Suggestions:-

The Divyang people should come with their partner in advance with their declaration form so that they do not face unnecessary delay in casting their vote. People with disabilities should provide the declaration form in advance by the Booth Level Officer.

The Sixth Challenge: -

The sixth challenge is the old polling booth system for the polling party. To understand the challenge of old polling booth system, the respondents were asked a related question, out of which the question is as follows: -

Question-6. Does the polling booth system need to be improved further?



In the response of this question 84% respondents said Yes and 12% said No, 4% respondents said, cannot say.




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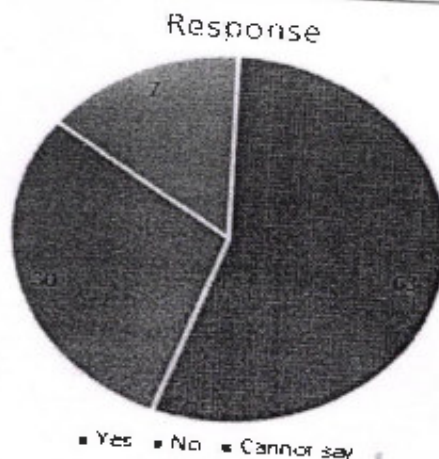
Most of the buildings that are used as polling stations are old buildings. The condition of the buildings of many of the polling stations are not good. And there is also a practice going on that the building which has been made a polling booth earlier is made a polling station again. It has often been seen that instead of new buildings, old buildings are made polling booth because earlier those buildings had been polling booth. Despite the new buildings, the old buildings are made polling booth. Further, when the polling party reaches there for elections, many polling stations are not cleaned properly. Here cleanliness is compromised. This affects the polling party psychologically and physically. Living in the midst of unclean conditions certainly makes work frustrating. Along with this, it is also the work of the polling party to prepare the polling booth for voting in the polling station, in which they also have to adjust the furniture.

Suggestions:

Arrangements should be made for the polling station suitable for conducting the poll which has adequate window, lights and fans, and there should be enough space for the conduct of the poll, as well as adequate care should be taken of cleanliness. And instead of old buildings, new buildings should be used for polling booth. Where new buildings are not available, work can be done from old buildings, but where new buildings are available, priority should be given to new buildings for making polling booths.

The Seventh Challenge: -The seventh challenge for polling party is Facility of Postal Ballot for those who are involve in Polling duty. The respondents were asked a related question, out of which the question is as follows.

Question-7. Doing duty in the polling party the facility of postal ballot provided to the polling officers needs to be improved?



In the response of this question 63% respondents said Yes, 30% said no need to improvement and 7% of respondents said, cannot say.

Such officers and employees who are engaged as a polling officers, face difficulty in getting the postal ballot. Generally, in the assembly whose name is in the voter list and duty is also in the same assembly, the employees get the postal ballot, but such employees who belong to other assembly constituency and their duty would have been in another assembly other than their assemblies are unable to get the postal ballot or face difficulty. Because the employees of other assembly constituency are not able to get the postal ballot of their assembly constituency. Such employees have to go to the Collector's office of their district and take postal ballot, but they are busy in election duty they are unable to go and they do not even vote because of not getting the postal ballot. The second problem is that the postal ballot does not reach the home address in time. And the polling party which takes the responsibility of conducting the polling on its shoulders, it is very sad for them not to vote on their own.

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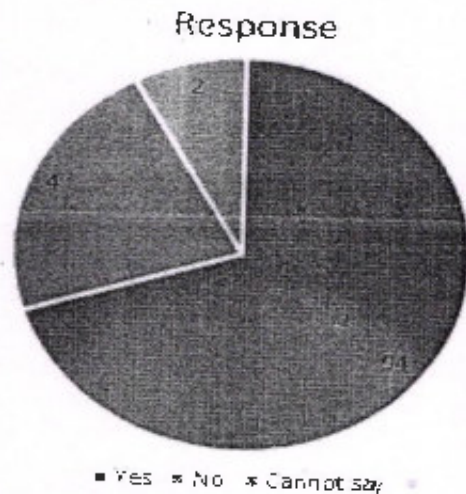
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Suggestions: - All the polling officers engaged in the polling work should get an opportunity to vote. It should be arranged in proper way. Adequate arrangements should be made to give postal ballot to such employees who are from other assembly constituencies. Postal Ballot for the employees of other constituency can also be made available to the employees by calling from their constituency and after voting it can be deposited in that constituency. And if the postal ballot is sent to the voter by post, it should be ensured that it reaches the voter at the right time.

The Eighth Challenge: -

The eighth challenge for the polling party is related to the system of honorarium to be given to them. Respondents were asked related question which is as follows.

Question-8. Does the honorarium decided for the polling officers doing polling duty, improved?



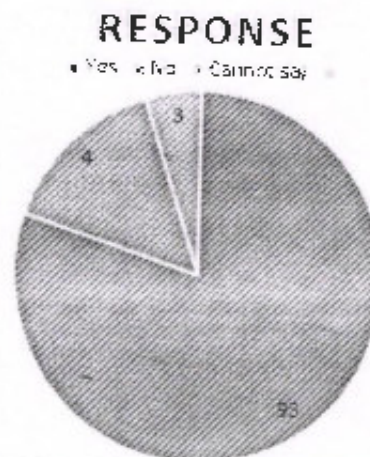
In the response of this question, 94% of respondents accepted that there is a need of improvement and 4% of respondents said that no need of improvement, 2% of respondents said cannot say.

Polling party is given honorarium for conducting elections, and it is now being given in the form of online payment. In such a situation, when the data related to bank payment is collected, it is not entered properly, Due to this many people are not getting their honorarium. The second problem of honorarium is that after difficult election duty, the presiding officer gets 1200 rupees and other polling officer gets 500-800 rupees as honorarium. The honorarium is given less than the work. Another problem is that the polling parties in reserve are sometimes given a nominal honorarium of around 100 rupees and sometimes nothing at all.

Suggestions: -All the polling officers engaged in the polling work should get the honorarium in time. Its arrangement should be ensured. And honorarium should be increased. The reserve team also must be given a respectable honorarium as they also stay out of their home for 3 days.

The Ninth Challenge: - The ninth challenge is a need for improvement the arrangements for the submission of polling related materials after the poll. Respondents were asked a related question, out of which the question is as follows.

Question-9. Is there a need for improvement for arrangements made for the submission of polling related materials after the poll?



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In the response of this question 93% of respondents said Yes, 4% of respondents said No and 3% of respondents said, cannot say.

When the work of voting is completed, after that it is very difficult to submit all the materials related to the election. It has often been seen that when the election material has to be submitted, then there is a provision of sufficient chair and table for those who collect the deposit. They sit comfortably in one place and examine all documents but for the polling party, just carpets are arranged on the ground on which they have to sit and fill all your documents and submit it where voting material is to be submitted there is no arrangements of furniture and cooler fans to sit there. The non-availability of chair and table for the polling party who are exhausted from continuous work, makes the election work even more difficult for the polling party. These facilities are not luxury rather they are minimum bare necessity.

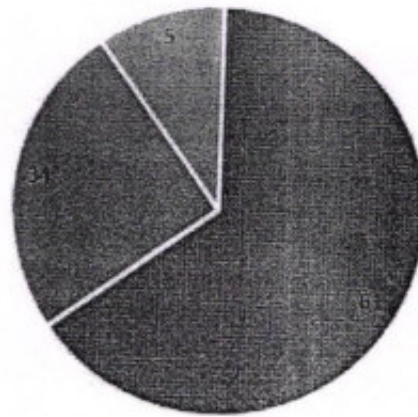
Suggestions: - Arrangements should be made to submit the voting material in a systematic manner after the completion of the poll. Adequate chair tables should be arranged for the polling officers to sit at the place where the polling material is deposited. The Chair tables of government schools can be used for this. Along with this, chair-furniture can also be taken on rent.

The Tenth Challenge: - The tenth challenge for polling party is related to training system. Respondents were asked a related question which is as follows.

Question-10. Does the training given to the polling party for the poll work need improvement?

In response of this question, 61% of respondents accepted that the system of training should be improved, 34% of respondent said that there is no need for any improvement in the

Response



■ Yes ■ No ■ Cannot say

training system, 5% said cannot say in response to this question.

In fact, when the polling party is trained, a training booklet is provided. The work that has to be done in the election is shown sideways is explained. Different types of forms are explained. But the demonstration of the entire election is not shown here. The demonstration lacks many things. The forms are explained but it is not told how to fill them. Due to the lack of demonstration, people do not understand the entire election process very well.

Suggestions: -

How to get the trainees to conduct elections from at least 100 voters. It should be demonstrated from beginning to end and all kinds of forms should be filled by each polling party.

Conclusion: -

From the analysis of the above question, it becomes clear that the role of the polling party is very crucial in the Indian electoral system. Along with this it is also very clear that the work of the polling party is very challenging. The polling party has to face difficulty in getting the poll work done.



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The reason behind this why the polling party has to face difficulties, then the following reasons comes to the force: reason in this is the lack of proper training of the poling party, the absence of the suitable polling rooms and accommodation, Lack of proper arrangements to carry the polling material to the polling station, lack of proper procedure for voting of persons with disabilities, lack of proper arrangements for depositing the voting materials after the completion of the polling, possibility of the mistake due to the sound of the 'BEEP'. work overload on polling party and next reason affects polling party mentally in which they are unable to get the postal ballot and last reason is that the polling officers do not get the honorarium on time, then it affects them mentally. Along with this, many suggestions also came to the fore. Now appropriate reforms are needed to simplify the work of the polling party. So that whenever any person whose duty is engaged in the polling party, they would not feel that this work is completely tiring. Certainly, if we improve the work of the polling party, then the work of the polling party will run smoothly and the people working in the polling party will not feel any difficulty. Hence, the proposed hypothesis gets satisfied with the conclusion and suggestions.

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