

Calcutta Notebook

MCR

ANNA MOVEMENT AGAINST corruption in high places seems to have brought into focus a lot of issues other than corruption that dog this West Minister model of parliamentary governance. The debate over inclusive governance and electoral reforms is gaining currency with every passing day. Many think it is time India changed its electoral system from the present First Past the Post (FPTP) to Proportionate Representative (PR) system.

Democracy as it has evolved through the recent centuries of human history is the sum and substance of Utopia. In Greek, Utopia means 'U-topia' meaning no place or it can mean 'Eu-topia' which means a happy place. They call India the biggest democracy of the world. In reality it is a U-topia (no place) for a vast majority of people and Eu-topia (happy place) for a small minority people like the Ambanis and their class.

Electoral systems are evolved in order to make representation of peoples possible. The First Past the Post (FPTP) evolved as a representative electoral system in countries with only two parties and two distinct ideological positions in governance. This was a modern phenomenon. In the postmodern society, societies have become multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual etc. with multiple ideological positioning. This necessitated a different form of electoral system to accommodate differences. Proportionate Representative (PR) electoral system has emerged as an inclusive democratic form of governance.

India's constituent assembly clearly established the frictions of the emergence of exclusive and inclusive democracies. The efforts of members of Muslim community to usher in Proportionate electoral system in India met with different roadblocks. The National Law Commission once again recommended PR system for India in 1999 and the report is gathering dust. Most nations (more than 162) have already shifted electoral system to proportionate system.

India is a multicultural society, which is in need of very special measures for democratic governance. The complex reality of Indian State makes it difficult even for experts to develop a clear understanding of the undercurrents that guide its destiny. The praxis of the First Past The Post (FPTP) electoral system in India has further accentuated the intricacies of its governance. The international workshop of electoral systems experts, held in Berlin between 17 and 19 of October 2011 recognizes that the FPTP electoral system, vogue in India, is a legacy borrowed from the British. India has come a long way in its political life from the time it got independence from the British. It is now emerging as a major player in the global economic scenario. It is an active member of dozens of international governmental organizations and has signed or joined dozens of international treaties. However, the representative character of its democratic governance leaves much to be desired in terms of the results it produces for more than a billion of its people.

Politically speaking India has arrived at an era of coalition politics. One may not see a reversal of this coalition politics in the near future. It is a well recognized truth that FPTP system of elections is best suited for countries that have two-party system. India, with its multi-party system and coalition politics is in dire need of changing its electoral system to a more inclusive representative system that also addresses the needs of coalition politics in a multicultural society. The Berlin workshop of electoral systems experts after due diligence on complex realities of Indian democratic governance has come to the conclusion that the Mixed Member Proportionate Representation System with two votes per voter will address better the changing needs of Indian democracy. It must be recognized that most inclusive democracies in the world have already shifted their electoral system to one or other form of proportionate electoral system. In order to make democracy in such a huge multicultural society as inclusive as possible it is also recommended that India adapted MMP with a ratio of 30% direct seats and 70% party list seats. Also in this connection Dr Ambedkar may be recalled to diagnose the disease of Indian democracy. What he said in August 1955 deserves fresh attention : "Separate Electorate or reservation of seats must not be resorted to. It would be enough to have plural member constituencies (of two or three) with cumulative voting in place of the system of single member constituency embodied in the present constitution. This will allay the fears which the minorities have about linguistic states".