



Growing Electronic Intervention in Indian Democracy: A Case-Study of Solving the Problem of Duplicate Voters in Goa

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ABSTRACT

E-democracy is much awaited development in Indian Political system which has a great potential of making democracy further strong. The process of e-governance whether in public or private sector, gives the lesson to usher the era of e-democracy. The application of Information and Communications technologies (ICTs) in democracy will go long way to ensure free and fair voting system and more accountable peoples' representatives. A case-study of using software technology in Goa is a classic example of electronic intervention which opens wider avenues like cooperation between Election Commission and private sector to improve our democratic processes.

Keywords: E-democracy, E-governance, Information and communication technologies, People-Politician Interface, Duplicate Voter Finder, Goa.

1. Introduction

The Indian IT industry has risen from a position of virtual non existence to one where it has occupied the pride of place in the global IT industry. IT is increasingly transforming the manner in which our democracy is running as also the relationship between politicians and the public and facilitates a more transparent and clean public life. Consequently, there should be a well formulated e-democracy in India. Though e-governance is the application of information & communication technologies to transform the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of government and its agencies, e-democracy is the use of information and communications technologies and strategies by democratic actors like elected officials, political parties, etc. within the political processes of local communities, states/regions, nations and on the global stage. E-democracy facilitates more alert and responsive representative as serving a paramount goal of socio-economic development. In fact, e-democracy paves the way for e-governance because it is only people's democracy who decides the direction and process of governance. Consequently, e-democracy ultimately leads to modern, well informed, participative and strong democracy.

It is an era of great technological advancement which has impact over democracy and so to say, transforming democracy into e-democracy. Despite India making great strides in the IT industry, there is a reluctance to put efforts for achieving a complete process of e-democracy to ensure better participation of people in democratic governance. It is only because of e-democracy, we can ensure the better electoral politics and mitigate the factors of bad means to win the elections. Through electronic means, the factors of money and muscle power can be reduced down tremendously. In other words, electronic intervention in democratic processes will cater the need of correcting duplicate voters, maximizing voter turn out,

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removing the possibility of booth capturing, manipulating local administration and so on and so forth. Hence, there is a need to understand the importance of ICTs for our democratic system at large. It will serve in two ways; one is related to complete electoral reform and is to bridge the gap between people and their representatives. Though Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) have started the use of electronic means in democratic process, there has been a lack of will power and understanding its importance. However, our fast changing society and economy coupled with revolutions in IT are transforming this dream into reality.

2. Changing Democracy and IT

The success of democracy in India defies many prevailing theories that stipulate preconditions for democracy. After more than five decades of periodic elections in which all political offices are contested, and in which all adults are qualified to vote, there is a little doubt that democracy in India has taken root. However, Indian democracy is best understood by focusing, not mainly on its socio-economic determinants, but on other factors like power distribution or re-distribution in society and advancement in peoples' awareness. Moreover, "The success of India's democracy is less about its substantial accomplishments and more about its institutionalizations" (Kohli, Atul, ed. 2004). In India, the democratic institutions and its functions are well embedded in the society. The institutional settings of democracy at grass-root level have gained further momentum through the processes of Panchayati Raj. These all institutions of democracy have played a great role in empowerment of unprivileged class and women. Therefore, with all visible odds, democracy got its required acceptability in Indian society. A new revolution is unfolding leading to growing consciousness and political activism among the masses. "There are a new types of movements found to be growing among the women, the youth, the unemployed, the migrants-the whole spectrum of what can be called the underclass of history" (Kothari, 2005).

However, in recent time, the capacity of democratic structures to realize the long-cherished ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity is being questioned. The political Parties and representative institutions that had been conceived for promoting the democratic process and providing liberation from traditional constraints are becoming vulnerable to the influence of anti-democratic forces. There is a growing poverty, rising illiteracy, inequality, injustice and, in consequence, a considerable spurt in violence. In sum, changes in India are already taking place, though the basic social terrain is still stagnant. There is still a challenge to translate the utopia of humane and just society into reality. In the age of technological advancement and IT revolution, we can do it easily if electronic intervention in democracy and governance will be institutionalized. Goals for e-governance and e-democracy should include improved government decisions, increased citizen trust in political system, better democratic process including free and fair elections, increased government accountability and transparency, ability to accommodate the public will in the information-age and to effectively involve stakeholders, including NGOs, business, and interested citizen in new ways of meeting public challenges.

3. E-Democracy in India: Evolution and obstacles

Now, there is a vast democratic divide, much larger than the digital divide, where the scarcity of time and attention is eroding the fabric of civil society and undermining the legitimacy of government. It is essential that we create new channels of representative democracy, enabled by information and communication technologies, that encourage effective "on your own time" participation as legitimate complement to in-person, often time discriminatory forms of political participation. We should shake democratic complacency and excessive partisanship out of our system and so, there is a need of much broader concept and practice of e-democracy in India. It is very close to e-governance because e-democracy is the "representative e-government". In a present age of our country, elected representatives need access to information and communication resources. It is necessary for them to inform and listen to their constituents; it is necessary for them to communicate with one another; and at the most basis, it is necessary for them to discover and represent the wishes of those who have elected them as their representatives.

While we elect individuals, we appreciate and understand that they must then balance three sometimes opposing forces: their own conscience; the philosophy of their party; and the interest of their constituency itself.

India has been somewhat of a late starter in terms of the use of IT for general purposes and it is natural that this should be reflected in its political system as well. For making our democracy more vibrant and strong, there is a need of using electronic means in electoral processes but political parties and Election commission have been engaged only in making rules which always inherits loopholes. Apart from many rules and laws, there should be a policy to enable the citizens and administration to make electoral process friendly for really deserving candidates. All the factors of illegal means associated with elections can be minimized by using electronic tools. Government and Election Commission have taken some steps in regard but it is not sufficient enough to leverage the advantage IT developments in democratic process. There is evolution of e-democracy but there is no developed system of e-democracy.

The use of EVMs has evolved the practice of e-democracy in India. In a country where rigging of elections and booth-capturing are rampant, electronic voting has ensured free and fair polls to the great extent. The numbers of parliamentary constituencies where EVMs have been used have been increasing over the years and polling in all future elections is to be done entirely through EVMs. Computerized photo- identity cards, introduced in the mid-1980s, is also checking bogus voting, another bane of the Indian electoral system. News of trouble or violence in far-flung areas is transmitted immediately with the help of sophisticated communication tools, enabling prompt remedial action. In other words, there is no denying the fact that computerized identity cards, electronic voting and improved communication equipment have brought in a larger measure of fairness to Indian elections than was the case earlier.

On the part of Political Parties and Leaders, individual MPs are using IT to organize their work and political parties are using it to a limited extent for party administration, databases on election results, constituency profiles and voting patterns, there is almost no attempt to use it to involve the general public or to bring about a new political culture in the country. They can use IT to their advantage also. Take the case of a MP. Each Parliamentary constituency comprises five levels of political units, from the Gram Sabha to the Assembly constituencies. Each MP, therefore, has to keep track of hundreds of elected representatives of these units, in addition to non- government organizations (NGOs) working in the area, government officials, village elders etc. He has to keep track of visits to villages, voting patterns, developmental issues, promises made, action taken etc.

However, still a majority of politicians are uneasy about the leveling of hierarchies that IT inevitably brings about. Indian party structures are extremely feudal in nature, with personality cults, coterie and intrigues dominating their functioning. As one politician remarked, “we say, we are a great democracy but the basic unit of a democracy – the political party – is not democratic at all.” IT tools can be used to great effect to communicate decisions and explain the rationale for policies to the party rank and file, building up an informed cadre which is better placed to carry the party message to the people. Unfortunately, party leaders do not see the necessity for this. Decisions on policies are usually taken by a small coterie and issued as an executive fiat and the party cadres are expected to blindly support it. The logic of distribution of party tickets for elections often defy logic and it is quite common to give performance indicators criteria the complete go by.

4. Case study of marking Duplicate Voters in Goa: “Viplav’s Duplicate Voter Finder”

In the electoral process of India, the factor of duplicate voters is a major stumbling block to ensure the elections free from partiality in one’s favour. Other violent means restrict the right of voting of some people but the using the duplicate voters by a Party or leader makes the entire process of election partial,

instead of fair. In other words, it does not restrict anyone's voting right but creates false voting rights which are generally used by Party or leader in its favour against others. This false identity of voters or duplicate voters spoils the chance of a candidate to win who should win based on real mandate. Therefore, the severity of problem created by duplicate voters must be understood because it makes entire democratic process as a mockery.

The duplicate names in the electoral rolls cause the bogus voting as these voters are non-existent or existed in the same list elsewhere or in other list of other polling booth. At the time of every assembly and Parliamentary election, there are allegations and counter allegations between political parties against each other for manipulating the voter list but Election Commission becomes helpless to resolve it fully. Election Commission generally conducts the revision process under which the names of duplicate voters are deleted. Sometimes based on allegations, it starts the cross-checking just before elections. For example, before Uttar Pradesh Assembly election, 2007, election commission deleted as many as 25 lakh names of "dead voters" from the voter lists.

However, the problem is still remaining as it has a greater magnitude. It happens due to some apparent reasons which can be categorized as typographical errors, migration and deliberate manipulation by political parties or leaders. Under the typographical errors, the manual paper work backed by untrained staff cause errors in writing and typing the names of voters. For example, "Shailesh" is written as "Shalesh" which gives the opportunity to the same person to enroll himself as "Shailesh" by producing some identity card. It creates two voters in place of one only due to spelling mistake at the time of writing or typing. In addition to this, migration to cities like Delhi and Mumbai also creates the problem of duplicate voters because without surrendering their voting rights at origin place, migrant population gets them registered as voters at new place in course of time. There is no clear mechanism with Election Commission to delete their names in origin constituency while registering them again in a new constituency. It again creates the bogus voting in absence of these migrant populations in their origin constituencies. Moreover, Political parties or individual leaders deliberately cause the registration of fictitious names in voter list so that they can manipulate the arithmetic of electoral politics at the time of election. It is generally done by the Party in power with the help of administration.

Election Commission revises the voter lists as minor revision and major revision. Minor revision is taken up when some names are challenged by the voter of a same polling booth and there is widely shared suspect over some names. A voter is entitled to fill up the Form 6 to challenge a duplicate name in the voter list. Besides, major revision is done by the Commission before every general election. However, at the very practical level, Election Commission is not well equipped to identify and delete the names of duplicate voters as it is not backed by skilled staff and technology. Here, there is an urgent need of electronic intervention to make our electoral process fair and smooth. The commission does not its own staff but it depends on the adhoc arrangement by state governments. All the local staffs including teachers, clerks and even administrators are not trained in this work and they may be prone to the influence of some party or leader. Somewhere, this problem arises due to the lack of clear demarcation of polling booths, which makes confusion a lot to those persons responsible for doing this work.

In this backdrop, Viplav Communications Pvt Ltd is pioneer company in the realm of e-democracy takes a forward step to resolve this problem. The objective of the company is to provide the latest tools and techniques of management to the people's representative to help them maintain constant contact with the electorate and perform up to their expectations. It has developed indigenous software, Duplicate Voter LocatorTM program to identify the duplicate voters which has worked successfully before recently held Goa assembly election. In the perspective of e-democracy, it is pertinent here to mention a case of work done by this program for Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Goa. This case-study is a classic example of using software in politics. Duplicate Voter LocatorTM program uses patent pending algorithms for string

matching and name guessing. The program breaks the problem of duplicate voters into four parts which are as follows:

- **Critical 2:** The program addresses the list comprises of those Voters who are registered at another Polling Booth along with their family. This means that not only one voter is registered at more than one booth but more voters in his family are registered at more than one booth. This case happens when the family changes residence, gets registered afresh in a voter list but does not get its name in the previous list deleted. The probability of their being duplicate entry is as high as 95%.
- **Critical 1:** Thereafter, the program takes the list comprises of those Voters who are registered again in the same Polling Booth with Serial Number in vicinity of its current position. This case happens when one person of a big family is registered with two slightly different spellings. For example Poonam and Punam.
- The probability of their being duplicate entry is as high as 80%. Some cases have been seen where the Software overreacts and reports as duplicates two siblings with similar names. For example, the software may erroneously report Riya Sharma and Rima Sharma as duplicate entries if the difference in their age is less than 2 years and they have the same Father's Name.
- **Major:** In addition to this, Duplicate Voter Locator™ program takes up the problem of a list comprises of those Voters who are registered again in the same Polling Booth but with Serial Number NOT in the vicinity of its current position. The case typically happens when a person is added in the Voter's List but his Address is incorrectly mentioned as a result of which the same name figures in a Voter List but at some other place altogether. The Probability of their being duplicate entry is observed to be around 70%.
- **Minor:** Moreover, the program also addresses a list comprises of all those Voters who have the same Name, Relation's Name, Sex and have a Similar Age (a difference of less than 2 years). It is possible that more than one persons of the same name are present and hence the probability of the reported name being actually duplicate is slightly lower (as low as 20%)

The company has provided a service of Duplicate Voter Locator™ program to BJP which filed the petitions against those duplicate voters who it felt will not support the party. It mitigated the chance of opposing votes for party and at the same time, without deleting the duplicate names of those who were supporting the party. The whole exercise was done by the Viplav Communications Pvt Ltd at one span within three months but help of Party workers had been taken to identify supporters and opposition in voter list. In this way, Duplicate Voter Locator™ program was proved instrumental to increase the vote percentage in favor of BJP. The BJP leaders in Goa were surprised to see, how this program identified he those duplicate voters who were hampering their chances to win the election. The magnitude of the duplicate voters in Goa was enormous (see appendix). In other words, the company has proved that there is an immense possibility to transform traditional way of democratic process into e-democracy.

5. Path Forward

The Duplicate Voter Locator™ program developed by Viplav Communications Pvt Ltd or such software can be used by Election Commission to solve the problem of duplicate voters at large. Election Commission should join its hands with private sector to do many works in this field for making our democratic process more simple, speedy and impartial. However, it does not share data in database format to facilitate non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to contribute in voter enrollment. In other words, Election commission can ensure to solve all electoral problems provided to open the work for private sector and NGOs. India is a large democracy which problems can be taken with the cooperation of all.

6. Further Work

However, there is a scope of improvement at the level of technology and so with Duplicate Voter Locator

TM program also. Still, it is difficult to address the problem of deliberate duplicate voters' registration because there are so many methods to do this. For example, some people deliberately get their names or others without surname while they are already registered with full name like Rakesh instead of Rakesh Tiwari, which causes a problem of over-matching with all Rakesh while searching the duplicate voters on this name. Nonetheless, available technology at present or more improved in future can play a very active role to make our democracy free from all possible aberrations. Since we are one billion state, we have to rely upon the technology to regulate the processes of democracy because in this large population, it is not a easy task to ensure free and fair poll just by manual paper work and unskilled staff.

It is evident from above discussion that objectives of achieving e-governance and transforming India goes far beyond mere computerization of stand alone back office operations. It means, to fundamentally change as to how the people's representative operates, and this implies a new set of responsibilities for the people politicians and government. It will require basic change in democratic process, political culture and simultaneous change in the existing processes of governance. Foremost of them is to create a new culture of political system which can cop with the advancement in technologies. In this regard, e-democracy will lead to better democratic process and more active peoples-politician interface enabled by the software containing Voter relationship management, systematic database, Internet, mobile communications, and other technologies in today's representative democracy. It will also bring out a change in the work culture of peoples' representatives and more participatory forms of direct citizen involvement in efforts to address public challenges.

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Appendix A: Summary of Duplicate Voters Detected

Total No. of Assembly Constituencies: 40, Total No. of Voters: 1,000,000, Probable Values

	Critical 2	Critical 1	Major	Minor
Total Detected	28453	927	2689	188646
Success	95%	80%	70%	20%
Actual Duplicate	27,000	741	1,882	38,000

Appendix B: Assembly Wise Duplicate Voters Detected

AC No	AC Name	Critical 2	Critical 1	Major	Minor
1	Mandrem	554	7	39	5506
2	Pernem	446	19	13	2783
3	Dargalim	775	22	75	4689
4	Tivim	441	18	23	3959
5	Mapusa	542	18	43	2538
6	Siolim	556	23	69	4182
7	Calangute	324	16	36	3495
8	Saligao	270	12	55	2635
9	Aldona	919	13	32	4984
10	Panaji	740	13	38	2999
11	Taleigao	603	23	71	4113
12	St.Cruz	898	38	52	5066
13	St. Andre	756	26	64	7061
14	Cumbarjua	828	19	57	4758
15	Bicholim	515	24	49	3280
16	Maem	417	8	70	2956
17	Pale	663	16	64	4397
18	Poriem	791	32	143	5318
19	Valpoi	505	24	71	3893
20	Ponda	1329	30	58	8976
21	Priol	1147	39	93	0
22	Marcaim	2071	36	141	15389
23	Siroda	988	21	55	7367
24	Mormugao	934	27	118	4442
25	Vasco-Da-Gama	807	26	66	3774
26	Cortalim	1234	75	181	9145
27	Loutulim	657	28	75	6305
28	Benaulim	475	25	57	6230
29	Fatorda	643	17	32	3602
30	Margao	677	14	35	3149
31	Curtorim	582	28	51	5743
32	Navelim	498	31	58	4072
33	Velim	395	23	22	3120
34	Cuncolim	362	13	26	2780
35	Sanvordem	922	20	40	5276
36	Sanguem	528	8	21	4077
37	Curchorem	583	12	39	4238
38	Quepem	931	38	238	5464
39	Canacona	579	18	76	3564
40	Poinguinim	568	27	143	3321