

A NEED FOR ELECTORAL REFORMS IN THE POST CONFLICT SRI LANKA

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Introduction

This paper addresses the question of how an electoral system affects the society and leads to intra-party and inter-party conflict in Sri Lanka. Elections are the defining movement in any democracy {Katz.1997.p.3}. Clearly, one function of elections is to provide a competition for office and a means of holding government to account. As they perform a fundamental task of conferring legitimacy to elected government. Strictly defined, electoral systems are the mechanisms by which preferences of peoples are translated into seats in representative institution [Rod Hague.2007.p185]Such rules are as important as they are technical. They form the inner workings of democracy; often little understood by voters but essential to the systems operation As such, their impact on the whole range of elements that make up the political character of a society is quite considerable. The behavior of political parties, government or candidate or ethnic groups for elected office will, for example, in large measure be conditioned by the shape of an electoral system. More importantly the way in which an electoral system translates vote in to seats may influence the degree of public support for the democratic system itself. If, for example, citizen do not perceive that their preferences are adequately reflected in the legislature or executive following an election their support for the system in general is likely to decline. The subject or electoral system is, or ought, therefore to be or central interest of anyone concerned with the operation of democratic system.

The main feature of an electoral system is whether the parliamentary seats obtained by a party are directly proportional to the votes it receives. Today the system of representations is differing from simple majority to proportional representative method. PR is more recent than non-proportional systems. It emerged in continental Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century, stimulated by the founding of associations dedicated to electoral reform. Under the PR system every party would receive the same share of seats as of votes. Although, the mechanics of PR are designed with this principle in mind, most 'PR' systems are not perfectly proportional.

Sri Lanka entered in the 1978 with a presidential system of government and proportional representative electoral system. Under the PR system preferential vote was introduced by the JRJ government because it was found that under the Proportional Representation (PR) system, party leaders could manipulate lists of candidates to have their favorites returned making a mockery of the popular will. According to the original system, electors were required to simply vote for a particular party and representatives were selected by the party leader beginning from the top of the lists of candidates. It was a huge disadvantage to the candidates who were popular but not in the good books of party leaders, who had the discretion to decide the order in which contestants names would appear on the lists of candidates. This system, it was argued, brought about party leaders' dictatorship. The

preferential vote, no doubt, helps electors vote for their favorites in the race with a view to ensuring their election but the price the country has had to pay for this exercise is enormous. This system creates competition not only between political parties, but also among them, and thus explains why candidates from the same political party would seek to intimidate their own party members.

The Manape system involves massive political, social, economic and environmental costs. Under the PR system several elections held with much of political violence which led to political murders and rigging in the polling. Several mainfactors pave the way for the increase of election violence due to preferential vote system. The leaders of the political parties have not taken any practical steps to control the unlawful practices and violent behavior of their candidates and the party supporters. In fact, some party leaders encourage their supporters to such violence. Such candidate believe that they are empowered to act their own and do not hesitate to obstruct the political campaigns of the other candidate in the same party, resulting escalation of violence. For such violence the electoral system of the country under the preferential vote system should be changed as it has created unhealthy rivalry among both candidates and voters. It has also treated division and confusion. The present preferential voting system will have to be changed in order to create a friendly political environment within the country.

Electoral reforms are long overdue and there is no reason why steps should not be taken in a hurry to introduce them urgently. There is little hope for a polity which has a rotten electoral system breeding rivalry, acrimony, hatred, odium and violence. It is therefore, not surprising that the debate on electoral reform has been become central theme in the politics of Sri Lanka.

Research methodology

To understand demerits of present electoral system of Sri Lanka, quantitative and qualitative analysis of both primary and secondary data were used. News papers, books, research articles, journals, internet articles were used for secondary data. Interviews, questionnaire, focus group discussion were used for primary data.

Discussion and conclusions

This research focuses on the demerit of the proportional representative system especially how intra- party conflict make political violence among the same party members and its impact on political system of Sri Lanka.. The major finding of research that, preferential voting system in election create competitive among the members of same party for 'preferential vote' The Manape is the mother of all battles at elections save the candidates in the polls. It also leads to intra- party disputes and has made the whole electoral process an unholy mess which pave the way for intra- party conflict.

References

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