



## AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF EMPOWERMENT OF THE ELECTION ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

With Special Reference to the Deaths of 48 Election Employees During Voter List Revision and Election Duties in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Maharashtra

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### ABSTRACT :

India's electoral process is one of the largest democratic exercises in the world, administered by the Election Commission of India under Article 324 of the Constitution. The Commission has earned global recognition for conducting free and fair elections across diverse geographical and socio political conditions. However, the increasing administrative burden placed upon deputed government employees during voter list revision, census operations and polling processes has raised serious concerns about employee welfare, institutional coordination and systemic reform.



**KEYWORDS :** India's electoral process , employee welfare, institutional coordination and systemic reform.

### INTRODUCTION

During October, November and December 2025, and over the last five years, several employees and officers in states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Kerala, Maharashtra and Rajasthan reportedly lost their lives or suffered serious injuries while undertaking election related work. The deaths of 48 election employees during voter list revision and election duties in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Maharashtra over the past two years demand urgent institutional introspection.

This article analytically examines the structural challenges within the election administrative system and argues for its empowerment through welfare reforms, structural restructuring and research based policy interventions.

### Deputation Based Election Administration and Financial Dimensions

India's election system largely depends on deputation based staff drawn from various government departments. Teachers, clerks, engineers, revenue officials and other public servants are assigned election duties in addition to their regular responsibilities.

It is estimated that through deputation based arrangements, excluding expenses such as food, refreshments, honorarium, tents, hired vehicles and electricity bills, the government and the Election Commission save approximately ₹524 crore during a single general public election. Even during a single municipal corporation election, the estimated saving is at least ₹1 crore.

While this model reduces immediate financial expenditure, it transfers significant human and administrative costs onto employees. Increasing population, technological transitions, data management requirements and inadequate manpower intensify this burden. The absence of a

permanent and independent election administrative cadre under the Election Commission due to financial and structural constraints further aggravates the situation.

### **HUMAN COST AND FAMILY DISTRESS**

The ages of some deceased election employees were 32, 36, 42, 48 and 52 years. These were economically productive years during which individuals typically shoulder major family responsibilities. The untimely death of such earning members destabilizes families financially and emotionally.

In many cases, minor children are left behind. As per government rules, the spouse may receive employment on compassionate grounds. However, this does not compensate for the long term loss of income and security. Families face multiple financial pressures including housing loans, the need to purchase or maintain residential property, children's education, medical expenses and future marriage expenses.

If the spouse of the deceased employee is illiterate, educated below the 12th standard or even a graduate lacking computer and typing skills, she is often appointed to a Class IV position such as peon, porter or sanitation worker. The downward occupational mobility and social vulnerability create lifelong hardship. Had the employee survived, he would have continued earning, and the family's income would likely have grown as children entered employment. The death of the primary earner collapses a major economic pillar of the household.

These realities justify the demand for a uniform minimum compensation of ₹ 30 lakh for families of employees who die during voter list revision or election duty. In states where ₹ 10 lakh or ₹ 20 lakh is provided, the remaining amount should be contributed by the Election Commission. Employees who suffer injuries should also receive structured financial and medical support.

### **Institutional Relationship Between the Election Commission and Parent Departments**

Employees appointed on deputation often continue to perform duties in their parent departments during election training periods. This indicates weak coordination between the Election Commission and parent appointing authorities.

The legal and administrative relationship between the Election Commission and deputing authorities needs clarity. Once an employee is deputed for election duty, full administrative control for that period should rest with the Commission, and parent offices should be restrained from assigning additional work. Failure to ensure this coordination results in excessive workload, stress and avoidable health risks.

### **Training Deficiencies and Disciplinary Disparities**

Short duration training conducted only after election announcements is insufficient for complex electoral procedures. Errors such as improper covering of photographs at training centers and public offices reflect inadequate orientation regarding the Model Code of Conduct and neutrality norms.

At the Balgandharva Rangmandir training center in Pune, newspapers used to cover photographs reportedly displayed visible images of political leaders. Similarly, at a junction near the Ghole Road regional office in Pune, a board covered with a newspaper displayed a sideways photograph of a public figure. Such incidents, though possibly inadvertent, highlight the need for standardized protocols stating that newspapers used for covering must not display leaders, political parties, caste symbols, religion, idols or flags on the front page.

Disciplinary actions must be consistent and free from discrimination. In one instance, a female employee was suspended for alleged negligence, while in another case officers responsible for more serious lapses were not suspended. Transparent inquiry mechanisms are essential to maintain morale and trust.

Annual workshops funded by government departments should include election awareness and procedural training. This would reduce stress during election periods and prevent panic based enforcement measures such as initiating police action against employees for non attendance at short notice training sessions.

### Research Initiatives and Institutional Apathy

Academic research plays a crucial role in administrative reform. An application for post doctoral research on election administration was submitted in 2013 to Savitribai Phule Pune University. The university initially stated that post doctoral research was not included in its courses. After pursuing the matter under the Right to Information Act and approaching the University and College Tribunal, documentary evidence revealed that the university had sought a ₹ 2 crore grant to encourage post doctoral research. Eventually, the university forwarded the application to the University Grants Commission in 2016 after a delay of three years. Even after nine years, no approval or rejection was communicated.

Research papers and suggestions on election employee burden were presented in seminars including a 2018 seminar organized by the Maharashtra State Election Commission on Democracy, Good Governance and Elections. Numerous written representations were submitted to municipal election authorities and to 15 State Election Commissions. Twenty six emails containing 15 specific suggestions were sent to the Election Commission in New Delhi. A complaint forwarded by the Prime Minister's Office to the Chief Election Commissioner's office reportedly received no response even after a year.

Such prolonged inaction discourages research based reform and creates the perception that suggestions from independent researchers are neither acknowledged nor tested, even on a pilot basis. Issues of Plagiarism and Intellectual Recognition.

Concepts and proposals presented in seminars and publications are sometimes later reflected in training workshops without acknowledging original contributors. When plagiarism complaints are submitted, absence of inquiry undermines academic integrity. Transparent mechanisms for citation and recognition should be institutionalized to encourage policy oriented scholarship.

### Administrative Overlaps and Census Coordination

Simultaneous orders for census operations and electoral roll revision have led to the appointment of the same deputed employees for both tasks. This overlapping authority results in extreme workload and weak work life balance.

Ideally, electoral rolls should be updated after completion of the census. However, if elections are scheduled earlier, interim revision may be necessary. In one state, a discrepancy of nearly 18 million voters was observed after updating electoral rolls. Possible reasons include the absence of a recent census and data gaps arising during the COVID 19 period. Coordinated planning between census authorities and the Election Commission is therefore essential.

### Need for a Permanent Election Administrative Cadre

The recurring strain on deputed employees suggests the necessity of establishing a permanent and independent election administrative cadre under the Election Commission. Such a cadre would:

1. Reduce dependence on ad hoc deputation
2. Ensure specialized training and expertise
3. Improve accountability and neutrality
4. Strengthen research integration into policy
5. Protect employee welfare through structured service conditions

Though financial implications may be significant initially, long term institutional efficiency and reduction in human loss would justify the investment.

Recently, Gram Panchayat elections were conducted in certain districts. In one district, a polling station was established at the highest point of a fort. There are only 160 voters at this location. The polling staff and police personnel climbed the fort on foot for about one hour to conduct the voting process properly. Climbing the fort for one hour and descending for another hour could have been made easier and more convenient. It would have been possible to incorporate certain technical, medical, geographical, and advanced facilities with proper prior planning.

For this purpose, consent and permission could have been obtained from the Election Commission, the concerned government authorities, General Administration, the Hon'ble Governor, the

Hon'ble Chief Minister, the Finance Department, the Archaeology Department, and the Department for Conservation of Historical Monuments. In my opinion, a helipad could have been constructed on this high fort, and the polling staff and police officers could have been transported there by helicopter. This would have reduced their two hours of physical and mental strain. A permanent helipad could have been developed on a flat surface of the fort for continued use.

I would also like to suggest a second option. In every government and private office, there are employees who are sportspersons, including mountaineers. Across various government departments, there are officers and staff who practice mountaineering. In some offices, such employees are granted special leave and encouragement to participate in mountaineering activities. A dedicated group of such trained mountaineering personnel (including police staff) could have been formed to travel on foot to this polling station.

The third option would have been to equip the polling personnel with oxygen kits, nebulizers, aspirin and nitroglycerin tablets, along with a doctor, two nurses, and a stretcher while climbing the fort. While constructing a helipad, necessary permission or approval could have been obtained from the Archaeology Department and the Heritage Conservation authorities.

If a helipad and helicopter facility had been used to conduct polling at such an extremely high fort, this polling station could have been recorded globally as the "world's first high-tech polling station." It would have conveyed an international message that the Election Commission of India takes proper care not only of every voter but also of every polling staff member and security officer.

In another state, a polling station is set up on a mountain for even a single voter. In places such as Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh, polling stations are established at high-altitude locations. In the future, similar arrangements of helipads and helicopter transport could also be implemented in such areas.

During the election process at Raigad Fort, some inadvertent mistakes were made by the polling staff. However, how appropriate is it to hold those employees solely responsible? The Divisional Commissioner's office maintains a list of election experts in the state. Yet, it appears that the concerned district and state election authorities either ignore this list or are unaware of it. When objections are raised regarding election management, the Election Commissioner states that "the election process is inclusive and the responsibility of all sections of society." Then why is the list of election experts available at the Divisional Commissioner's office not utilized? Why are suggestions or solutions not sought from such experts?

### **Neglect of Electoral Reforms Concerning Senior Citizens**

Whenever objections are raised against the Election Commission, the Election Commissioners repeatedly state, "Elections are everyone's responsibility; all sections of society must participate and extend their support in this regard." However, if a senior citizen seeks an appointment with an election officer, commissioner, or deputy commissioner three months prior to the elections to discuss issues related to electoral accessibility, even after the elections are over, no meeting is granted. Written correspondence or emails often go unanswered.

In such circumstances, how appropriate is it for senior citizens, who are making sincere efforts to safeguard elections and democracy, to repeatedly visit election offices in person?

In India, separate laws have also been enacted to ensure that the voices of senior citizens are heard. Recognized systems such as e-governance, emails, social media, and digital platforms have been established. Yet election officers and commissioners tend to overlook these avenues. Responding to letters remains a distant concern, and it is unfortunate that even inquiries made through official office phone numbers are not addressed.

### **Comparison of Certain Administrative Rules and Laws:**

Under the Civil Service Rules, there are provisions regarding discipline in cases of delay in official work and penalties for violations in that context. The rules also specify which administrative tasks must be completed immediately, within seven days, within twenty-one days, or on the same day. Alongside this, there are references to Service Guarantee Acts and the Right to Information Act.

However, in the case of election offices, it has been observed that when representations or applications are submitted, no information is provided even after four to five months of repeated visits and follow-ups. Ultimately, applicants are compelled to file a Right to Information (RTI) application, after which the required information is furnished. From such information, it often becomes evident that no action was taken on election-related notices or representations for four to five months.

Although the Election Commission is an independent body, it functions within the framework of Civil Service Rules. At times, it appears as though the principles of Ethics, Integrity, and Aptitude are forgotten while serving in positions within the election department. If election employees are negligent in their duties, immediate action is taken against them. However, in the case of election officers, not only is action rarely taken, but even an inquiry or show-cause notice is often not issued.

The motto of the Election Commission is that not a single voter should be deprived of the right to vote, and extensive efforts are made to ensure this. However, why are similar efforts not made to ensure that not a single deputed employee faces hardship or loss of life while performing election duties?

## CONCLUSION

India's democratic strength rests not only on constitutional provisions but also on the human beings who implement them. The deaths of 48 election employees during voter list revision and election duties in recent years reflect systemic stress within the election administrative framework.

Financial savings achieved through deputation based arrangements cannot outweigh the human and social cost borne by families. Adequate compensation, structured training, institutional coordination, research integration and the creation of a permanent election administrative cadre are essential reforms.

Empowering the election administrative system is not merely an administrative necessity. It is a democratic obligation. Protecting those who safeguard the electoral process is fundamental to preserving the integrity, credibility and moral authority of India's democracy.

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