

LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

The country is ready for Lok Sabha elections 2024 with a total of 102 constituencies in 21 states will vote on April 19 for the first phase.

The Indian elections indeed hold immense significance, representing a cornerstone of democratic processes in the country.

Established in 1950, shortly after India gained independence, the Election Commission operates independently to ensure that the electoral process is conducted transparently.

Led by the Chief Election Commissioner, appointed by the President, and comprising other members appointed by the government, the commission plays a pivotal role in shaping the democratic landscape of India.

The electoral process, marked by direct, secret, and universal suffrage for citizens above 18 years old, underscores the democratic principles enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

Democracy needs conscious, alert and aware voters

OMKAR DATTATRAY

Democracy is often hailed as the cornerstone of modern political systems and backbone of a robust nation and system. What exactly fuels this backbone? It is the citizens themselves, armed with civic and electoral knowledge and a deep understanding of their rights and responsibilities.

While many may hold strong political views, how many citizens know about the gritty of the electoral process, their rights and responsibilities? Electoral literacy is not merely about understanding how to cast vote, it is about comprehending the entire electoral process, the authorities involved, and the rights and responsibilities associated with being a citizen.

This understanding is critical especially in the world's largest democracy with a population of 140 crore people. Electoral literacy serves as the bedrock of an informed and participatory democracy. In such a vast and diverse nation, electoral literacy emerges as an indispensable tool for citizens to navigate the intricate landscape of democracy.

Equipped with knowledge and understanding, these citizens can effectively assess their needs, comprehend the issues that hold the most significance to them, scrutinize candidates and make informed decisions during elections. A lack of electoral literacy can lead to voter apathy, poor decision making and manipulation by political parties.

If citizens do not understand the electoral process, they might be swayed by misinformation or personal bias rather than making informed decisions based on candidates policies and records. Since India's first election in 1951 with a voter turnout of 45.7%, the electorate has witnessed remarkable progress.

(The author is a columnist, social and KP activist)

Startup India, Skill India, and Stand-up India: Empowering Youth v/s Freebies

DR BHARTI GUPTA

The precursor to writing this article is the recent Mega event of Startup Mahakumbh 2024, held from March 18-20 at New Delhi's Bharat Mandapam and Pragati Maidan, which exemplifies India's commitment to fostering youth financial empowerment, transforming them into creators rather than mere seekers of employment.

In a rapidly evolving global landscape, the youth population stands as a formidable force for driving socio-economic growth and development. Recognizing this potential, the Indian government has initiated various schemes like Skill India, Startup India, and Stand-up India. These programs are not mere promises of freebies; rather, they represent a strategic investment in building a more resilient and innovative economy by equipping the youth with the skills, resources, and opportunities needed to succeed in the 21st-century workforce.

Skill India: Skill India, launched on 15th July 2015, addresses the pressing need to enhance the employability of India's youth by providing them with relevant skills and training. The initiative recognizes that traditional education systems often fail to equip students with the practical skills demanded by the job market.

Under Skill India, a wide range of vocational training programs are provided across sectors such as manufacturing, construction, healthcare, hospitality, information technology, tourism, and more. These programs focus on imparting industry-relevant skills, including technical know-how, soft skills, and entrepreneurship training.

Startup India: Startup India, launched on 16th January 2016, is a landmark initiative aimed at fostering a conducive ecosystem for nurturing innovation and entrepreneurship in the country. Recognizing the transformative potential of startups in driving economic growth, job creation, and technological innovation, Startup India provides a comprehensive package of benefits and incentives to budding entrepreneurs.

One of the key components of Startup India is the simplification of regulatory processes and easing compliance burdens for startups. The initiative offers tax exemptions, faster patent examination, funding support through schemes like the Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS), incubation facilities, mentorship programs, and access to market opportunities.

While releasing the Sankalp Patra of his party in its headquarters, the Prime Minister asserted a significant point. He indicated the present tumultuous situation emerging globally and for India, he insisted on the need of a stable government - a government that will be capable of fulfilling the aspirations of its people and play a supportive role by helping the world recuperate.

Though these revolutionary initiatives invited voluminous criticism, the country was amazingly given a jolt as he succeeded in opening almost 50 crore new bank accounts, the segment of population that was left frozen from banking even after India's six decades of independence. Construction of about 12 crore toilets across the country had phenomenally helped a huge segment of the country's population, especially women.

Imagine how critical his decisions were! Never an ideologically sound BJP was perceived to have had the audacity to stitch an alliance with Mehbooba Mufti in Jammu and Kashmir. But the subsequent development in the most volatile Indian state proved his move in this regard was a well studied attempt to bring the situation of the state under control.

As he entered the national arena in 2014, there was unwavering doubt that had been lingering for long on the democratic efficiency of a multiparty polity. That the world thought it would be a lost case for India. Its democracy would fail to bless a single party with a majority.

A decade of change and politics of performance

M. R. LALU

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The initiative has witnessed remarkable success stories, with Indian startups making significant contributions to sectors such as technology, e-commerce, healthcare, fintech, and agriculture. By fostering a vibrant startup ecosystem, Startup India not only fuels economic growth but also positions India as a global hub for innovation and entrepreneurship.

Stand Up India: Stand Up India, launched on 5th April 2016, is a flagship initiative aimed at promoting entrepreneurship among women, Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs). The program seeks to address the historical socio-economic disparities by facilitating access to credit and support for aspiring entrepreneurs from marginalized communities.

The culture of providing freebies, while seemingly beneficial in the short term for certain segments of society, can have detrimental effects on the long-term economic growth and sustainability of a nation. Freebies often come at a significant cost to the economy in terms of distorted incentives, fiscal burden, crowding out of the private sector, inflationary pressures, interference with market mechanisms, generational debt burden, and dependency syndrome.

Freebies often interfere with the efficient functioning of market mechanisms by distorting price signals and resource allocation. When goods or services are provided for free or at heavily subsidized rates, it can create artificial demand and distort market equilibrium, leading to inefficiencies and misallocation of resources.

Freebies require significant financial resources, usually funded through taxes or government borrowing. This places a heavy fiscal burden on the fiscal health of the nation, diverting resources away from essential public services such as infrastructure development, education, healthcare, and social welfare programs that have a more sustainable impact on economic growth.

Excessive reliance on government-provided freebies can crowd out private-sector investment and entrepreneurship. When the government provides goods or services for free that are also offered by the private sector, it can undermine competition and deter private investment in those areas.

Freebies can contribute to inflationary pressures in the economy, particularly if they are not accompanied by corresponding increases in productivity or output. As the government injects more money into the economy to finance freebies, it can lead to an increase in demand without a corresponding increase in supply, driving up prices and eroding the purchasing power of the currency.

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As he entered the national arena in 2014, there was unwavering doubt that had been lingering for long on the democratic efficiency of a multiparty polity. That the world thought it would be a lost case for India. Its democracy would fail to bless a single party with a majority. Probably this approach on the Indian scenario gave pundits across the world a giggle of satisfaction. Modi's entry changed everything. India missed a hardworking leader with a vision and mission for decades. Those who came to hold the helm of affairs were confusingly held tighter by their coalition partners.

Imagine the level of India's commitment for global peace, Narendra Modi did not hesitate to tactfully warn a warmongering Putin telling him the time was not of war. World appreciated his note which indeed India was eligible to make and it did without vacillating. India's attempt to stitch a peaceful framework of unity for the global community through its G20 Presidency was another instance. Its efforts outlined a strong and solid bond among nations that in future will consolidate ideal principles of peaceful coexistence, calculatingly pulling a world from more bloodshed and chaos.

That the government under his leadership holds effective plans for India, as the landscape as he describes is passing through the best of its time, the Amrit kaal. And the imprint of his imaginations for India is easily visible and its undercurrent seems to be real and begins to solidify as the election heat looms. A fractured alliance of the opposition is too feeble and frantically aggressive on his plans and strategies. Whatever, if the man who is maintaining a consistent upward momentum in popularity gives you a chuckle of surprise, there is a reason for you to study him seriously.

Financing freebies through government borrowing can saddle future generations with a heavy debt burden, limiting their ability to invest in their own future and stifling intergenerational mobility. Excessive debt accumulation can also raise concerns about fiscal sustainability, leading to higher interest rates, reduced investor confidence, and potential sovereign debt crises.

The provision of freebies can foster a culture of dependency, where individuals or groups become reliant on government handouts rather than taking responsibility for their own well-being. This dependency syndrome can perpetuate cycles of poverty and hinder social mobility, ultimately undermining the long-term resilience and prosperity of the nation.

Skill development, entrepreneurship, and innovation are essential drivers of fostering economic growth. By investing in these areas, governments can stimulate job creation, enhance productivity, and foster innovation-led growth. Empowered youth are more likely to start businesses, create employment opportunities, and drive economic dynamism, leading to sustainable and inclusive growth.

Empowering youth through skill development enhances their productivity and competitiveness in the job market. By acquiring relevant skills and training, young people are better equipped to meet the demands of employers and contribute effectively to the workforce. This not only benefits individuals by increasing their earning potential but also strengthens the overall competitiveness of the economy.

Empowering youth from marginalized communities through initiatives like Stand Up India can help reduce poverty and inequality. By providing access to finance, training, and support services, these initiatives enable individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to break the cycle of poverty, create wealth, and improve their socio-economic status.

Startup India fosters a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship by providing a supportive ecosystem for startups to thrive. By offering incentives, funding, mentorship, and regulatory reforms, the initiative encourages young entrepreneurs to pursue their ideas, take risks, and scale their ventures. This promotes innovation, drives technological advancements, and creates new industries and markets, leading to job creation and economic diversification.

Skill development initiatives under Skill India help build human capital by equipping youth with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the modern economy. By investing in education, vocational training, and lifelong learning, governments can ensure that young people are prepared for the jobs of the future and can adapt to changing market trends and technologies.

Empowering youth through initiatives that promote skill development, entrepreneurship, and innovation can contribute to social cohesion and stability. By providing opportunities for meaningful employment, economic participation, and social mobility, these initiatives reduce the risk of social unrest, crime, and conflict, fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society.

(The writer is Assistant Professor, Central University of Jammu)

GI tags revitalize Kashmiri handicrafts and empower female artisans

KASHISH SAXENA

The hum of charkhas (spinning wheels) is once again vibrating through Kashmir's scenic valleys, as women artisans return to ancient crafts, thanks to Geographical Indication (GI) tags' new recognition and protection. These tags, together with progressive legislation, have revitalised Kashmiri handicrafts, ensuring their legacy for future generations. The recognition and protection provided by GI tags have not only restored traditional crafts, but also empowered women artisans who are the foundation of Kashmir's rich handmade culture.

small town in Kashmir, has been spinning Pashmina yarn since she was a youngster. For years, she struggled to make ends meet as the demand for traditional crafts decreased. However, with the recent spike in demand for GI-tagged Kashmiri products, Shazia's charkha has become a symbol of hope and success. "The GI tag has not only protected our heritage but has also provided us with a platform to showcase our craftsmanship to the world," she says with a smile. The economic impact of this revival is likewise substantial. According to a survey performed by the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the handicraft sector's revenue has increased by 30% since the introduction of GI tags for Kashmiri products. This increase has resulted in higher salaries for craftspeople, with average monthly earnings increasing by 20% over pre-GI tag levels.

atives to streamline the GI registration process and combat counterfeit products have increased consumer confidence in authentic Kashmiri handicrafts. The significance of GI tags extends from individual craftspeople to entire communities. As more women like Shazia return to their traditional skills, towns are experiencing a cultural rebirth. Younger generations are once again learning centuries-old techniques, ensuring that Kashmir's handicraft history thrives. The revival of Kashmiri handicrafts fueled by GI tags and progressive policies is a testament to the resilience of traditional craftsmanship in the face of modernization. As women artisans return to their charkhas and villages echo with the sounds of weaving and spinning, Kashmir's cultural heritage is being preserved and celebrated anew. With continued support and recognition, these timeless crafts will continue to flourish, enriching lives and connecting generations through the thread of tradition.

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