

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW  
MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES**  
**[ISSN 2581-5369]**

---

**Volume 3 | Issue 3**

**2020**

---

© 2020 *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.ijlmh.com/>

Under the aegis of VidhiAagaz – Inking Your Brain (<https://www.vidhiaagaz.com>)

---

This Article is brought to you for “free” and “open access” by the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities at VidhiAagaz. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Law Management & Humanities after due review.

In case of **any suggestion or complaint**, please contact [Gyan@vidhiaagaz.com](mailto:Gyan@vidhiaagaz.com).

---

**To submit your Manuscript** for Publication at **International Journal of Law Management & Humanities**, kindly email your Manuscript at [editor.ijlmh@gmail.com](mailto:editor.ijlmh@gmail.com)

---

## Book Review of “Every Vote Counts.”

---

PRACHILEKHA SAHOO<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*Election in India is not a passage of ritual that the country has to go through rather it is one of the grandest festivals which celebrates the essence of democracy. Like festivals are held with considerable preparation and time at hand, so is the Indian elections. The remarkable thing about this is the fact that people all over India, whatever may be the caste, sex, gender align together for a common objective i.e. to be represented and governed by the elected candidates. This book review is based on the book, “Every Vote Counts” by the author Navin Chawla.*

*Keywords: Election, EVM.*

### BOOK REVIEW

Every Vote Counts (2019). By Naveen Chawla. Published on February 10<sup>th</sup> 2019 by HarperCollins India, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, Pages 376. Price Rs. 699/-

The book is a living embodiment of the experiences shared by the former Election commissioner, who presented this condensed form of a volume where the nuts and bolts of election management, history and challenges were discussed and examined through the lenses of author. The author, a former CEC fuses the genres of memoir and history to produce an academically useful book on the great carnival of Indian elections. The tone of the author as a pedestrian cooing a prose, talked about the hard work that were put up by the officials, their struggles and perspirations which were the things that shone might and bright.

The author directs his observation to a very poignant movement to the delight of readers of the world that India in 1947 had barely 16% of literacy rate, added to those problems were the uneven integration of princely states and a traumatised partition; it took a chance at conducting elections. Many already had the opinion of it failing and crashing down but the chief architects of the freedom movement envisioned it to be successful reality which will be transcended to victory of the labour of the officials, of the civil servants and the early election commissioners.

The first anecdote in the introductory chapter where he talks about the “Great Indian Election” shares the incident of a certain person known as Pujari Bharatdas Darshandas. This incident is

---

<sup>1</sup> Author is a LLM student at LL.M. student, National Law University Odisha, India.

peculiar as the above-mentioned person refused to abandon his temple, dedicated to lord Shiva. He was not prepared to travel 20km to the nearest polling station to cast his vote. The place was located in the hamlet of Banej in Junagadh district of Gujarat which was the heart of India's only lion sanctuary where the rare Asiatic lion roams free. So, the officials included were one presiding officer, two officials, and some policemen crossed through 40km of dense forest to set up polling station. The officials stayed overnight and opened for work at 7 am the next day. The pujari came to cast his vote at around afternoon as he was the lone voter, the polling station was closed before the scheduled time as it was a special case. The pujari enjoyed his fame and fanfare that he was showered with and he would like a lion, displaying his proud mane with his sense of achievement disclosed that no other candidate ventured into the jungle to canvas for his vote but he does vote; without fail.

One would wonder why the author named the first chapter of the book as "The Great Indian Election". He definitely comes up with an explanation which is literal and metaphorical in nature. India, without a shadow of doubt is the largest electoral exercise in the democratic world. The number is voluptuous in terms of administrative apparatus and human resources required to conduct the polls. The electoral register in 2014 had 834 million voters (with over an increase of 100 million voters since the last election i.e. 2009 elections). The number of voters on the electoral rolls had exceeded to the combined entire population of North America or Europe and Russia. The manifestation of the election commission to conduct such a grand election within a time period with complex process involved delivers the election result with such ease definitely puts the commission as the keystone of democratic arch. It is therefore the reason, that in many numerous past surveys, election commission is one of the public institutions where most Indians repose their faith on along with the Supreme Court. Another interesting fact that can be noted is that the election commissioners haven been largely appointed from within the ranks of Indian Administrative Services. It has been done conventionally among the senior-most officers having achieved the rank of secretary in the Central government and normally who would have gathered over 35 years of administrative experience.

The author is of opinion that the organizational structure for a country like India, the election commission maintained a relatively small secretariat where 300 officials and staffs are commissioned in the New Delhi which is the headquarter. The commission headquarters is managed by just half a dozen senior officers of the rank of joint secretary and additional secretary. Several times during his tenure the commission put forth the suggestion before the union government to permit it to recruit its own officials for the secretariat rather getting

officials on deputation.

In the second chapter, the author expressed his amazement of the helm of the work done by the first election commissioner, Sukumar Sen. From building a structure from scratch, having left no notes or memoirs, very little is known about this wonderful man who has overwhelmingly taken this daunting job of conducting the first general election. The herculean task performed by Sen has been devised and the enormous challenges that he faced was documented in a single report published in 1954 by the ECI. The author has given Sen the title of unsung hero for conducting the gigantic task of first two general elections flawlessly. He had the unenviable task of identifying and registering an unlettered population. Back that time, the women refused to identify themselves rather they would take the names of their father, or husband or sons. Most people didn't even have surnames as the concept of surname was introduced by the Britishers. Later on, the people of India took surnames based on the names of their caste, village, town to which they belonged or took names from their occupation. Surname is an essential part as it is now demanded by the enumerators to complete the election register process. Sen's team comprised mainly from a team of Constituent Assembly secretariat. Another interesting anecdote that the author shares of the story of ballot box. The numbers were monumental; over 2473850 solid steel of ballot boxes were required. Twelve prospective companies were selectee and eventually five manufacturers were selected. Godrej and Boyce Company in Maharashtra, companies in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and UP were a part of it. Finally, 8200 tonnes of steel were used. The features of the box were such that it was tamper proof, it was to be equipped with a seal which would only be broken after the ballots had been cast, at the time of counting. Women were disempowered to cast vote during Sen's tenure as he ordered the striking off of the names of women who declared their inability to offer their own names as it was causing a lot of problem to come with an electoral roll containing names as so and son's wife or so and so's mother. He out of sheer frustration termed this as 'a curious, senseless, relic of the past'. Such was hue and cry that two million women voters were effectively disenfranchised. The author was amused by this. He thinks had this been done at today's time it would have been devastating. This is the reason why women's participation was low in the second election in 1957. Another interesting fact is that the commission was the first major institution to use the media (i.e. film and radio) to educate the public about his novel exercise in democracy. The Films Division made a documentary on electoral franchise and its functions, as well as the duties of the electorate. These were smaller but effective steps taken to aware and educate a country regarding election process, it was no less than a stupendous feat to achieve for the commission. In chapter three, the general election of 2009 has been covered,

which is a watershed moment as the number of candidates in the fray stood at all time high at 8070, the highest ever since EVMs came in 2004. Also, 556 women contested polls which is a feat in itself. It is also in this election that the head of an electoral body was changed midstream. This is also the first time that the electoral rolls were created bearing the voter's photograph as it reduced the scope of impersonation sharply. The author to conduct it as peacefully and perfectly, made detailed notes, followed compendium of instructions, the MCC and all other things pertaining to it.

In the fourth chapter the author deals with the money and muscle power that thwarts the election process. These negative forces have impacted severely and weakened the democratic structure which makes the aspirations of our freedom fighters futile. The dirt has filled beyond the scope as every legislator's career starts with a lie along with false election return files; the famous sentences reiterated by former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Now the stench has followed to the media with overtures of corruption, false and paid news. Initially the funding for elections for the first two decades were clean, they had prescribed limits in Representation of People's Act, 1951. Later on, corporate donations were encouraged which was banned by Indira Gandhi's government. This dried up the legitimate sources and scourge of black money was invented. It became a business rather than a service rendered to the public. Ideological moorings were deeply destroyed, indiscriminate electoral alliances started mushrooming. The 2003 amendment of RoPA changed the scenario of electoral campaigns. The expenses on transport and party propaganda no longer was charged from the individual accounts, planes and helicopters began transcending boundaries, paid by the party funds, whose sources of funding is kept as secret. During his stint as CEC for five and a half years, he began to see money as the fuel to the hydra headed monster i.e. the power/ influence it started having on people. How it can polarise the voting of the people, how it can manipulate.

The author finds it difficult to find the disclosure amount spent in the elections to prove as it threatens the very realisation of democratic rights and strikes a mortal blow to the accountability of the public. Most of the time during elections, tip-offs are given at dead of the night, the person's mostly stay anonymous for obvious reasons. The author further informs us that the Centre for Media Studies estimated the total expenditure of General Election in US in the year 2014 which was three times lesser than the amount spent in Indian general election of the year 2009, placing the figure at 5 million US dollars. Another worrying fact that CMS disclosed is that nearly one-fifth of the voters across the country were offered and received the money in the year 2008, 2009 and 2014. The author laments over the fact that when he was CEC, mushrooming of political parties became a norm. He had a list of 1300 so called parties

from which 2/3rd of them had never contested an election. The commission during his time seeks the permission of the government to deregister them but the government never gave any response. These so-called parties remain politically dormant while accumulate black money and large funds. The Parliament still has not given the Commission the power to deregister such parties.

In the fifth chapter of the book the author deals with the aspect of paid news, how certain newspaper demand money in exchange for favourable print and media coverage during the elections. The author lists out two instances where he has come across with. The author is shocked at the honourable newspapers chose to throw journalistic ethics to the winds and chose to position themselves in the forefront due to the fierce competition that is thriving in the media. They justified the act to be a mere legitimate commercial exercise. The author draws the attention of the reader towards the Levenson Inquiry in the UK.

The Levenson Committee in the UK was set up to investigate the broader question of ethics in the media. The government took certain lessons from the inquiry. It corroborated the findings of the PCI and other agencies, the parliamentary standing committee on information and technology in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting submitted a report to Parliament on May 2013 on the subject which was titled, 'Issues related to paid news.' The committee also proposed a slew of measures, kicking off a debate in the country. The most controversial sting operation was conducted by Cobrapost which stated about how some media houses were prepared to strike business deals to promote the Hindutva agenda and help polarize voters in the run up to the 2019 election. Further the chapter deals with the pernicious challenge that the social media and mobile telephony continue to pose in the wake of election and how difficult it is to be verified by the sources and control it. In the book, it has been stated that Facebook acknowledged that before and after last year's American election, between January 2015 and August this year, 146 million users may have seen Russian misinformation on its platform. YouTube admitted to the 1108 Russian linked videos and Twitter to 36,746 accounts. One can perceive the extent of polarisation of voting due to misinformation circulated through social media so much so that it threatens the very fourth pillar of the democracy. It has poisoned the mind of the voters and divided the opinions altogether.

The seventh chapter talks about the EVM controversy which we are familiar with already. During the time of elections, we have often heard the losing parties blaming the EVM for their loss. The EVMs in India has had rather a chequered and cumbersome history. After certain trials and tribulations for 22 years, it was brought into mainstream by the then CEC T.S. Krishnamurthy. Its reliability has been questioned a lot. The first usage was in the year 1982

however due to the reservations of important leaders of the opposition party it was not used immediately. The government referred this matter to the Electoral Reforms Committee. The committee witnessed the demonstration and was convinced but yet set up another Committee of Experts in 1990 headed by the Professor S. Sampath. The committee unanimously announced that the machines can't be tampered with. After certain debates and deliberations, EVMs were used in the 16th assembly constituencies in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi. Finally, in 2004 general elections it was put to test. An independent study conducted by the CSDS after the 2004 general election on the question of EVM vs ballot papers, there was overwhelming support to the use of EVM. Over 82% favoured EVMs.

In the later chapters the author talks about how elections were conducted in the Maoist affected areas, what has been done to mitigate the losses and what steps has been taken to bring down the death of the officials as it is rampant in those areas. The author also declares the J&K legislative election to be the most challenging election during his tenure.

The biggest takeaway from this book would be one can pick any chapter and read it with fascination. The vast country that is India, the wonder of elections, the events that lights up the mood and the anecdotal humour that you want to share, and some unfortunate incidents that touch a nerve. The beautiful aspect of the book is it deals with the historical background, brings around the current state of affairs and presents a hope for the betterment in the future.

However, the one hiccup that bothers me about this book that the author dedicated an entire chapter on his ongoing imbroglio and was engaged in settling the scuttles with his predecessor who was involved in recommending his name for removal. Independence of the election commissioners is one of the most important electoral reforms that the author gave paramountcy to, merely because he was emotionally and personally affected and invested in it. The author insists particularly to instil a sense of security in the election commissioners by making a constitutional amendment that makes the same procedure of removal as that of CEC and to give same protection as accorded to the Supreme Court judges. Another thing the author suggests is that the tradition of the senior most election commissioner taking over as CEC on the retirement of incumbent should be provided to eliminate the discretion of the executive.

On the whole, the book written by the CEC Navin Chawla has been a brilliant observation of the Indian elections. It has all the potential to galvanise a healthy debate on the numerous topics that has been provided in each of the chapters. He has substantiated it with statistics, study, facts and numerous events. It can be considered as a useful addition to the existing literature on the topic of elections.