None Of The Above (NOTA): A psychological Option

What is the issue?

- The 2020 Delhi Assembly elections were the 45th Assembly polls since the inception of the NOTA option in 2013.
- But, the meagre share of NOTA votes, and NOTA in its current form, are pointers to it being a toothless option.

What does some data reveal?

- Delhi has now provided data from five elections with the NOTA option; no other state has yielded such a preference for yet.
- But, Delhi's preference to NOTA is less than the national average.
- The percentage of NOTA votes has increased in 71% constituencies in 2019 than in 2015.
- Roughly one in 200 voters of Delhi opted for NOTA in the last 6 to 7 years, with relatively larger support for NOTA in reserved constituencies.
- In the 2019 Maharashtra Assembly election, NOTA became a runner-up in two constituencies.

What is the NOTA system of India?

- In 2013, India became the 14th country to institute negative voting through NOTA. However, it is **not a "right to reject"**.
- Even if there are 99 NOTA votes out of a total of 100, and candidate X gets just one vote, X is the winner, having obtained the only valid vote.
- The rest of the NOTA votes will be treated as invalid or 'no votes'.
- NOTA enfeeble the electorate as it does not empower to "select" either.
- It provides democratic means to express resentment anonymously rather than boycotting the polls outright.

What are the pleas to extend the scope of NOTA?

- A former Chief Election Commissioner recommended **holding elections again** in those constituencies where the victory margin is less than the total numbers of NOTA.
- A PIL has been filed in Madras High Court seeking the **full right to reject in place of NOTA**.
- In 2018, the Maharashtra State Election Commission (SEC) issued an order

that if NOTA has received the highest number of valid votes, a fresh election shall be held for such a post.
- The SEC of Haryana issued an order that if NOTA gets maximum vote, none of the "real" candidates will be declared elected.
- The re-elections will be held afresh and the candidates securing votes less than NOTA would be barred from contesting in that re-election.

Will NOTA bring any significant change?

- While introducing NOTA, the Supreme Court anticipated that there will be a systemic change.
- It also predicted that the political parties will be forced to accept the will of the people and field candidates who are known for their integrity.
- NOTA percentage should either increase to enforce the political parties to field candidates with "integrity".
- Or NOTA percentage should consistently decrease if the electorates feel that the system has achieved the desired level of cleansing.
- In contrast, the share of NOTA votes in India remained around a meagre level of 1% on an average; 1.11% in the 2014 Lok Sabha, and 1.08% in 2019, if we consider constituency-wise averages.
- This perhaps represents a confused state of mind of the electorate.

What could be done?

- The ECI may state that the candidates securing lesser votes than NOTA are barred from contesting in the next election from that constituency.
- An experiment can be conducted by using NOTB ('none of the below') instead of NOTA, after changing the rule suitably, can be attempted.
- This may help us whether such an option as the first on the electronic voting machine might produce a significantly different outcome or not.

Source: The Hindu

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