Why the Aadhaar - voter ID link must be stopped?

What is the issue?

Aadhaar use to construct elector databases has resulted in exclusion and will help in profiling the voter.

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What were the previous attempts?

- In 2014, the Election Commission of India (ECI) conducted two pilot programmes on linking the voter id with Aadhaar in the districts of Nizamabad and Hyderabad.
- The ECI launched the National Electoral Roll Purification and Authentication Programme (NERPAP) on April 2015.
- However a Supreme Court order on August 2015 halted the programme.
- Unfortunately Telangana and Andhra Pradesh had nearly completed it for all residents.

How did they link both data?

- **Methodology used in NERPAP** involves use of the State Resident Data Hub (SRDH) application of the Government of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh to curate electoral rolls.
- It is supplied by the UIDAI or collected further by the State governments.
- SRDH gives the States information on residents without biometrics
- UIDAI is also restricted to collect data on caste, religion and other sensitive information data for Aadhaar
- However states can collect this information, if required, as part of Aadhaar data collection. It termed the process as Know Your Resident (KYR) and Know Your Resident Plus (KYR+).

How did ECI use this data?

- ECI used these SRDH applications to curate electoral rolls which resulted in the deletion of a sizeable number of voters from the list in Telangana in 2018.
- It is not just Telangana but across India; the ECI has already linked Aadhaar and voter IDs of close to 30 crore people resulting in voter deletions (Unstarred question 2673, Rajya Sabha of January 2019).

Why the Aadhaar - voter ID link must be stopped?

- **No Door to Door verification -** An RTI data shows that the door-to-door verification will get subsumed now.
- **Affects universal adult suffrage -** A software algorithm commissioned by the Government is maintained by a private IT company now.

- ECI subjecting key electoral rolls to surveillance software damages the concept of universal adult suffrage.
- Experience in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh highlights voter suppression and disenfranchisement.
- **Compromises secret ballot system -** The linking of was primarily to build a biometric dependent voting system from the very beginning.
- A mock election was conducted in Telangana by the State Election Commission with smartphones using facial recognition, voter ID, Aadhaar number and phone number for authentication while voting.
- This method can kill the “secret ballot system”.
- In E-voting malware can be used to change the outcome of an election.
- While the present Bill does not look into large-scale e-voting, there is an issue of ensuring electoral integrity.
- **Profiling of people -** The linkage will help political parties create voter profiles and influence the voting process.
- **An edge for Parties in Power -** Online trends on the day of voting and micro-targeting voters using their data will make it easier for political parties in power to use data for elections.
- A ruling coalition will always have an advantage with the data it possesses. It can announce welfare schemes based on beneficiaries.
- **Issue of Fake Aadhaar** - Aadhaar itself has several fake and duplicate names. This will create complexities in the voter databases that will be hard to fix.
- This process will introduce errors in electoral rolls and vastly impact India’s electoral democracy.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/why-the-aadhaar-voter-id-link-must-be-stopped/article38050980.ece

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