

A radical idea – proposed by Kautilya

Politicians must go through a rigorous selection process before being allowed to contest elections.

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Politicians, grossly deficient in their abilities to deliver, love power and have no power to love, say many analysts. A common complaint is that elected representatives never visit their constituencies after being elected, let alone improving the plight of the people who voted them to power. For money and power, many elected members shamelessly defect from one political affiliation to another to bring down elected governments. Some develop delusionary messianic self-images, many behave like a bunch of sheep, as depicted in *Yes, Minister*. It sounds like a campaign speech or pontification or self-eulogisation whenever they speak. They behave as if only they have all the wisdom. Many do not even know that they do not know.

One principal reason for all this is that politicians are elected, not selected. Most electoral systems are faulty. But that is a separate issue. In India, a substantial proportion of voters belong to economically backward classes. It is common knowledge that poor people are more vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation. In the current era of internet, on the one hand, and of excessive advertising, on the other, political parties spend huge sums of money to hire agencies, especially during elections, to 'buy' poor voters and to manipulate others by questionable means. Cambridge Analytica, for instance, is a case in point.

Politicians must be well versed, with a deep understanding of the history, the geography, the cultures, and traditions of the diverse group of people they are expected to serve. They must bear the highest ethical characteristic of integrity. They must have a scientific temper and high respect for science. Fundamentally, they must satisfy some minimum eligibility requirements in terms of qualities and expertise in running the government. Unfortunately, there is no process in place by which the politicians can be selected. It is a free-for-all situation.

Everyone in society goes through a selection process for everything – from admissions to school and college to obtaining qualifications to entering employment and promotion to higher positions, in all walks of life, except politics.

For jobs and employment, from primary school teacher to university lecturers, from attendants to officers in government, from technical staff to professionals such as engineers, doctors, nurses, man-

gers, journalists, etc., all have to go through highly competitive selection processes, containing psychometric tests in some cases. In addition, they undergo training and evaluation at various levels.

But there is no selection process or evaluation for politicians. It is thus elemental that anyone wishing to be a politician, irrespective of affiliation or ideology, must go through a stringent and rigorous selection process before being considered for contesting elections.

Kautilya, traditionally also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta, is generally credited with authorship of *Arthashastra*, an economic and political treatise of ancient India. This comprehensive compendium on governing a nation is believed to have been written some 2,000 years ago. Besides many aspects of governance, Kautilya has discussed extensively the qualities of the persons who should be in government.

The best king (the leader), he says, is one who learns unceasingly to enrich his thoughts, shuns falsehood, sincerely fosters prosperity of people, develops, and empowers people, lives a humble life. The greatest enemies of a king (leader) are not others, but conceit, arrogance and recklessness, he says. A just king (leader) wins the loyalty of his people not because he is king (leader), but because he is just.

Selection of *Amatyah* (ministers and high officials), he says, must be based on the ability to execute, character and values. The *Amatyah* must be well prepared, excellent in their fields of expertise, well-versed in theoretical and practical knowledge, kind and philanthropic, free from hate, and dedicated.

Kautilya has also laid down methods of screening the politicians. The politicians must be tested and must successfully exhibit the qualities elaborated by him. The text enunciates eligibility requirements and rigorous selection process – including test of knowledge and intellectual abilities, character, values, integrity, etc. It also stipulates regular performance evaluation of all involved in the governance of a nation.

In our country, we have fool-proof admission tests like JEE and CAT for higher education, UPSC for civil service, and recruitment tests for military education and training. It should not be difficult for us to develop such a selection and testing system for politicians.

To achieve this, formulation of laws by the central government or constitutional reform may be necessary. There is enough expertise, experience and wisdom in our country. All relevant central and state institutions and all political parties must come together to work out the details of institutionalisation and implementation of such a system.

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