

THE SOCIAL SCIENCE
PERSPECTIVE

Volume 3, Issue 1, 2023

Students Field Trip

*Karnataka Convention on Electoral
Democracy*

Time: 10:00 am

Date: 29 October 2022

Venue: Indian Social Institute, Benson town, Bangalore



**KARNATAKA CONVENTION ON
ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY**

Saturday, 29 October, 2022 from 10.00 AM
Indian Social Institute, 24, Benson Road, Benson Town, Bangalore

10- 11 am
Registration and tea
Songs and a skit on the electoral process

11 am - 1 pm
Co-Chairs: Proneb Dasgupta & Medha Patkar
Presentation: Count every vote & make every vote count
-M G Devasahayam
Presentation: Impact of money power on elections
-Anjali Bhardwaj
Presentation: ECI's conduct of fair elections
-Trilochan Sastry
Floor Discussion

1:00 pm - 2:00 pm: Lunch

2 - 4 pm
Brainstorming on action plan, way forward & setting
up of Karnataka Election Monitoring Platform
Chair: Aruna Roy
Panel: Medha Patkar, Nikhil Dey,
Kathyayini Chamraj & Harish Narasappa

4 - 5 pm
Interaction with political party representatives
on engagement with civil society for free & fair elections

#CountEveryVote
#MakeEveryVoteCount

organised by Constitutional Conduct Group, Jan Sarokar, People-First,
National Alliance for People's Movements and Election Watch (Karnataka)
For further details- 9731817177, 7338513066, 9945395587

The students of MAPPA, CeRSSE, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), accompanied by Dr. Rubina Pradhan, Assistant Professor, CeRSSE, participated in “Karnataka Convention on Electoral Democracy” on 29 October 2022 at Indian Social Institution, Benson town, Bangalore from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. The event consisted of a diverse audience and speakers from various members of civil society organisations to political party representatives. The major agenda of the convention was to come up with an immediate action plan for a free and fair election aimed at the 2023 Karnataka elections and the 2024 general election. The

convention centred around 3 'Ms' i.e. *money power, muscle power and machine power*. The session started with a round of introductory sessions among the audience. The first speaker, P.R. Dasgupta, highlighted the disturbing nature of press reports on elections concerning the naming and shaming of the people who are eligible to vote but do not vote. This practice by the media should be checked.

The second speaker was a renowned civil society activist, Ms Medha Patkar who focussed on the ill practices of electoral bonds between the corporates and the political party exchequer. She highlighted that this kind of bond must end. Another aspect she highlighted was the crime associated with money and how money has been capturing every space of the citizens' lives. Therefore, a revolutionary change is essential, not just electoral reforms. The agenda being carried out by different parties before elections is an antithesis to the basic need fulfilment of the people. Citizens as the first pillar of democracy must take up these vital issues. Another crucial issue highlighted by the speaker was the accountability and responsibility of the Election Commission regarding the functioning of the EVM machines. Since EVM machines are manufactured by companies under the EC, they must be accountable for the EVM tempering. She asks, "Why has it not been corrected?" "Why have the engineers not been made to demonstrate its functioning to prove that it cannot be tempered?" She claims that no action has been taken since EC itself is politicised. Ms Pathkar also focussed on the role of media is supposed to be people-to-people contact and non-partisan and which has been highly partisan. In such a situation, the real concern is to find a way to control media or to spread alternative media. She also suggested that the propaganda of the party should be in the open public domain. Most importantly, she came up with the 4th 'M', 'Mafia', which has now controlled electoral issues.

This was followed by M.G. Devasahayam's talk on people's participation in governance at every level—local, state and national. He argued that in recent years the sanctity of the electoral process has been questioned mainly because of the flaws in the EVM voting and VVPAT counting. He specifically opined that the EVMs are hijacking the will of the people and hence are unfit for democracy. In order to check this flaw, he highlighted the public demand to "count every vote and make every vote count" and to launch it into a country-wide movement.

The next speaker was professor Trilochan Sastry whose major arguments revolved around how the political parties have already started their money propaganda for the 2023 Karnataka election. He suggested that the EC should be pressured to recognise its accountability and responsibility to conduct a free and fair election. Also, he emphasised that we need to reach out to the people and build awareness among them regarding the fair practice of election.

The last speaker, Ms. Anjali Bhardwaj highlighted the anonymous funding that the political parties receive from different actors across the world. The government got rid of the clause that stated that 20 thousand rupees were acceptable for party funding through the 2017 amendment on electoral bonds. It was done through an undemocratic process by amending some sections of the below Acts:

- A. IT ACT
- B. Foreign Contribution Regulation Act
- C. Representation of People's Act
- D. Company Act

This amendment allowed the funders to make anonymous funding without people knowing about it. The issue of transparency which is a vital aspect of any good governance was lost.

This was followed by the discussion sessions keeping in mind the challenges and the agenda of the discussion was to map the way ahead for the 2023 Karnataka elections. Some of the immediate suggestions that emerged out of the discussion were: to have an exact voter list from the 29 constituencies in Karnataka and analyse to find out the duplicate voters or suspected entries; operate the model code of conduct right from the beginning and not just before the election; ensure the proper counting of votes; along with election watch, there has to be a media watch especially social media watch to monitor false and wrong information; there is a need to organise campaigns against hate speech and make citizens' realise the value of votes.

The event ended with discussions among the civil society representatives and the political representatives from the Aam Admi party, CPI, and Congress party.



MAPPA students after the convention



MAPPA students with Medha Patkar and Anjali Bhardwaj