

PREFACE

The History of franchise in India is very fascinating, on which very few people have worked. Indians had some republican tradition in the past, particularly from 6th century to 4th century B.C. The Gana states flourished during that period. In these Gana states a kind of voting system was in vogue, but the states declined very rapidly due to rising of monarchial states. They disappeared once for all giving birth to nothing of that kind in future again. It is only under the British time that the English constitutional system was put into experimentation in India and the system developed fully into rule of parliament in Independent India.

The political awakening came to Indians particularly after the end of the mutiny of 1857. The well known factors responsible for political awakening in the latter half of 19th century in India were Indian poverty, British policy of exploiting Indians economically, spread of English education, modern means of communication, uniform pattern of British administration and the indigenous social reform movements. One important result of mutiny was that British administrators in India realised that they had no means to understand the Indians except the rebellion or mutiny. This understanding was the basis of the idea of associating Indians with the law making body and with the administration.

It is in fact from the Act of 1866 in which the idea of nominating the non-official members to the councils of Viceroy and Governor was accepted that the long drawn battle for Indians began. Indian National Congress which was first national political body, was founded in

1885 with a view to having Indians' representation in the governing of the country. In 1883, it is to the credit of Lord Ripon, who thought that the right to elect their representative must be given to the Indians. But thinking that it will be too premature to introduce the idea at the top level, he did an experiment of enfranchising them with local bodies. The Indian National Congress, right from the beginning, demanded for Indians' representation in the legislature and right to vote for Indians. The Act of 1892 increased the number of non-official members and also provided nomination of Indian. But the Act of 1909 went ahead and enfranchised some more Indians. But the genuine attempt was made by the Southborough Committee appointed in 1917 to enquire into the opinion of leading Indians, in the direction of granting right to vote to Indians. But in spite of all pleading by the Indians for adult franchise only .5 per cent of the people on the basis of their wealth were enfranchised by the Act of 1919. The Act of 1935 could embrace only 3 per cent of population with right to vote.

Indians' poverty, traditionalism, sectional view, illiteracy, etc. were considered genuine hurdles in introducing adult franchise by some of the thinkers. Other reason was that British rulers in India were calculatedly slow in delegating powers to Indians. All this ended only with the end of British rule in India.

The story of the franchise has been discussed here with the help of original sources which were in plenty and available in printed form. For example, the copies of Councils Acts from 1861 to 1945 available in different libraries including the Barrister Balasaheb Khardekar Library of Shivaji University, and some archives in India. The references

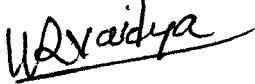
of the various Commissions, such as Southborough Commission, Simon Commission are of immense value for this kind of a topic. The proceedings of the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League throw important light on the political changes in India.

Discussions and debates in the British Parliament that took place and provisions in every Act concerning India, reveal the attitude of the British parliamentarians towards the Indians' demands. The copies of these debates are available in the libraries like Bombay University Library, library of Gokhale Institute of Pune. Extensive use of these debates has been made here while analysing the matter of fact of every Councils Act. In addition to these, newspapers in India have also been used.

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