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MY VOTE MATTERS

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

10th NATIONAL VOTERS' DAY

'ELECTORAL LITERACY FOR A STRONGER DEMOCRACY'

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From the
Chief Election Commissioner of India

The first issue of 'My Vote Matters' was presented to the Hon'ble President of India a year ago on the eve of the Ninth Voters Day. The magazine has now entered into the second year of its publication. It has been a medium that aptly captures, develops and shares knowledge on election management in all its nuances. The narratives, stories and vignettes emerge from real experiences from the field and are a testimony to both the challenges and opportunities afforded by each election. It gives voice to the millions of election personnel through the length and breadth of our magnificent country. It's a telling of their rare experiences, feats, joys and sorrows, since an exercise of such epic proportions reaches out to the very inner consciousness and tests the innate strength of each individual.

The NVD Awards bestowed on the occasion of National Voters' Day 2020 extolled the achievements of election officials who rose to the occasion despite formidable difficulties. The current issue of this magazine contains a detailed account of the outstanding contributions made by them during the 2019 General Elections. Their initiative, innovative approach and indomitable spirit are commendable. I also place on record my appreciation for all those who were nominated by their respective CEOs, but could not make it to the final list. Their achievements are a veritable lighthouse whose transformative radiance made the 2019 election successful in every sense of the term. The CEOs who undertook the exercise of selecting the award winners, are also worthy of appreciation.

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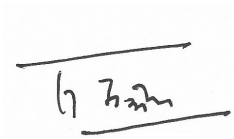
Our National Icons constitute an important link between the Commission and the voter. I wish to thank our National Icon, Ms. Mary Kom, one of the greatest sportspersons India has ever produced, who took time out to share her thoughts with 'My Vote Matters' on a range of issues.

I take this opportunity to welcome on board Mr. Jasbir Jassi, singer, lyricist, and performer-par-excellence. I am also delighted to welcome Dr Niru Kumar, a pioneer in the field of gender diversity, medicine, psychology and inclusion. Their appointment as National Icons shall surely add to the strength of the Commission's outreach and connect with voters.

The looming threat of Covid 19 has posed new challenges before EMBs across the world. Conduct of elections in the face of this deepening uncertainty and global health crisis will be nothing short of a critical test of confidence, leadership and robust democratic practices. ECI is working out targeted response mechanisms and redefining processes in order to address this challenge.

The current issue of 'My Vote Matters' offers a rich blend of insights from the ECI Headquarters in Delhi to real life experiences from the field. I am sure our readers will find the narrative and illustrations quite interesting.

I compliment the entire editorial team of 'My Vote Matters' for their remarkable efforts to bring out this issue in time, despite the constraints imposed by COVID-19.



Sunil Arora
Chief Election Commissioner of India

Towards Paperless Polling: Booth App

It was perceived that Governments have been less effective than the private sector in using information technology to reinvent work processes. Now, mobile technology offers an opportunity to hit the reset button

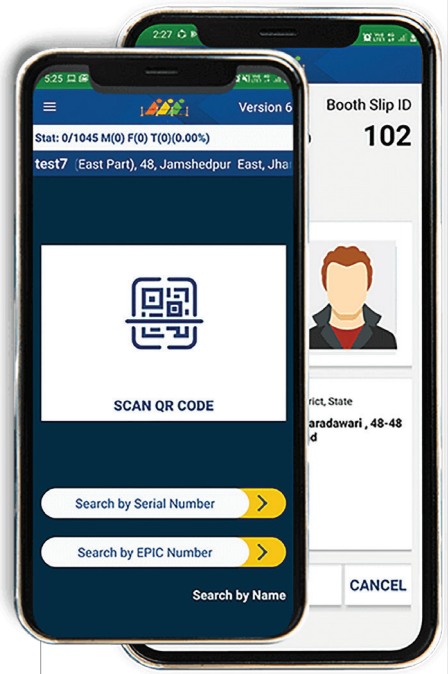
DR. KUSHAL PATHAK
DIRECTOR ICT AND CISO, ECI

You are woken up by an alert from your phone about the election today. You then receive the navigation guide to reach the polling station. As you are having a sip of morning tea, you get an alert about the facilities at the polling station like toilet, parking area, wheelchair availability and seating place with a digital photograph of your polling station. While you are reading the newspapers, you get an alert about the list of all the contesting candidates of your area. While you get ready, you get an alert about the best time to vote and how long the current queue is at your booth. You get excited and decide to go to the polling station and find that you get the digital token number at the gate and you are asked to sit comfortably till your token number is announced, like the flying attendant calling your name in the airport before boarding: 'row number 10 to 15 please come forward for boarding'.

You enter the polling station with your digital photo ID card and the polling staff instead of searching your name in the big ledger, simply scan your ID card in a second. They instantly mark your attendance on the mobile device and allow you to vote.

Mobile: A source of security, not a threat

Upon authorisation and secured authentication, only the polling party can log on to the app. The Booth level Officer at the polling gate scans the QR code printed on the Photo Voter Slips / Digital Photo Voter slip and allows authorised voter entry. The polling staff inside the polling station scans and identifies voters by marking their attendance. Meanwhile, the Presiding Officer keeps a watch of polling and records events and incidences. All such reports are notified to Sector Magistrates, the Returning Officer and to District Election officers.



This technology was first piloted in Hamirpur (Uttar Pradesh) in five polling stations; after that in three assembly constituencies Samastipur (Bihar), Kasba Peth (Maharashtra) and Phagwara (Punjab); and then in 10 ACs of Jharkhand; and most recently in 11 Assembly constituencies of Delhi. A total of 6,447 polling

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stations have used the Booth App with a fair bit of success. A total of 59,70,388 scans have been done using the app.

Achieve more for less

The Booth App has brought in many transformations in the way polling is conducted.

Firstly, identification of voters is made through the Mobile App: instead of searching from the physical list of electors, polling officials are able to search voters by using the Booth App.

Secondly, the Booth App ensures faster polling: Considerable time in the polling station is spent in the identification of the voter from the multiple pages of the physical copy of the electors. If the name is not found in the usual list, another laborious exercise of searching for the name in the list is carried out; the Presiding Officer gets involved and an elector list of the previous year is then searched. Many times, a voter not finding the name, insists on searching again. This creates uncertainty and a colossal waste of time. All this has been eased out by the instant search using the app.

Not only has the identification become fast, it has also become more reliable. The Mobile App displays the coloured photograph along with complete details of the voter directly from the central database; the polling staff are confidently able to identify the voter, instead of relying on the printed black and white copy of the elector list.

ECI ADOPTS A 'MOBILE-FIRST' APPROACH

Welcome to Digital Polling Station, a foreseeable future, powered by the Election Commission of India's digital mobile technologies. The Election Commission of India has developed in-house the minimalist technology interface through the use of the mobile phone for the Polling Party.

The Booth App is a mobile app meant for Booth Level Officers, Polling Officials, Presiding Officers and Sector Magistrates. The App helps in faster identification of voters using edge technology. It is unique in that the app is not dependent upon connection with the server for operation. It works in an offline environment, even when there is no Internet connection. Thus, it is designed to work in an absolute network shadow area. It has evolved from iterative design: Prototype, test and prototype again

The Booth App is environment-friendly and saves a lot of paper. Imagine the Lok Sabha Elections of 2024 when the polling official is saved from so many documents and paperwork. He transacts his core function only through the mobile app.

Thirdly, Booth App is a panacea for detecting duplicate voting. If the voter re-enters the queue after voting, the app does not allow duplicate voting and alerts the polling official. On the other hand, if polling officials reinsert a voter by any malicious intent, the app will not allow that to happen. This feature will further improve with facial recognition and strong network connectivity and will then be able to prevent duplicate voting across polling stations.

Fourthly, the Booth App introduces yet another fantastic feature: advance queue information. By using an advanced computational algorithm, it calculates the queue at the booth and displays it on the Voter Helpline Mobile app. This facilitates voters immensely by letting them know in advance what the best time for them to vote could be.

Fifthly, Booth App can scan the 'Digital Photo Voter Slips' that were recently made available on the Voter Helpline mobile app. Voters can now download the digital Photo Voter Slips from the Voter Helpline Mobile app by linking up their mobile phones. The digital slips contain an encrypted QR code that can only be read by the Booth App. Once the voter presents the Digital Photo

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Voter Slip, polling officials only need to scan it to ascertain the identity of the voter.

More aware, more effective, more in control

The Booth App mobile technology not only helps polling officials to do more with less in the face of shrinking workforces and tightly stretched timelines but also allows them to do their jobs better.

The Booth App has, on the one hand, improved the convenience to voters but on the other hand, it has completely transformed the efficiency with which statutory requirements can be fulfilled by polling staff. Presiding Officers can fill in the mandatory PRO diary through the mobile app. The many statutory reports are generated on the fly without the manual calculation. Thus, the chances of errors are decreased manifold.

The Booth App establishes a channel of communication between the various vital functionaries. It provides structured and rapid communication in case of events and incidences. By a simple app-based reporting mechanism, the report travels to the Sector Magistrate, the District Election Officer and the Chief Electoral Officers.

One of the very important features of the system is the real-time reporting of the voter turnout. Earlier, a data entry team was established to call, record and compile the voter turnout every two hours. This created a lot of clerical errors in recording, transmission and reporting. With the introduction of the Booth App, voter turnout is recorded without any manual intervention.

As the app works without the Internet to transfer the voter turnout to the Returning Officer, almost all polling station data is received at the server in real-time. This not only generates voter turnout but also provides a rich decision support system tool. Returning Officers are able to see the gender distribution of voters in real-time, male/female/others distribution, queue at the polling station, speed of the poll and the busiest hour at the polling station. They are now also able to get reports such as the time of polling party dispatch, arrival, mock poll start, poll start and poll end on the dashboard.

By using simple technologies, the Booth App has proved its tremendous potential in transforming how polling is conducted. The ultra-simple mobile interface allows faster acceptability. As of now, 25,270 officials have used the Booth App, including Booth Level Officers, polling officials, Sector Magistrates and Returning Officers. They were hands-on with the use of the app, after just one day of training.

By integrating the Mobile App in the workflow of the polling official, the Booth App has not only simplified the work of the polling officials but greatly improved the convenience for the voters. The day may not be far when polling officials will carry a mobile and EVM to the polling station and walk away with confidence at the end of the poll.

It was perceived that the Governments have been less effective than the private sector in using information technology to reinvent work processes. Now, mobile technology offers an opportunity to hit the reset button. The effectiveness of mobile technology in elections is dependent largely on how it is implemented. But if mobile technology is a challenge, it is also an opportunity: a chance for the ECI to start closing the productivity gap, reassess its reporting practices, boost its efficiency in conducting elections, and renegotiate its relationship with the voters it serves.

And the Booth App has proved it.

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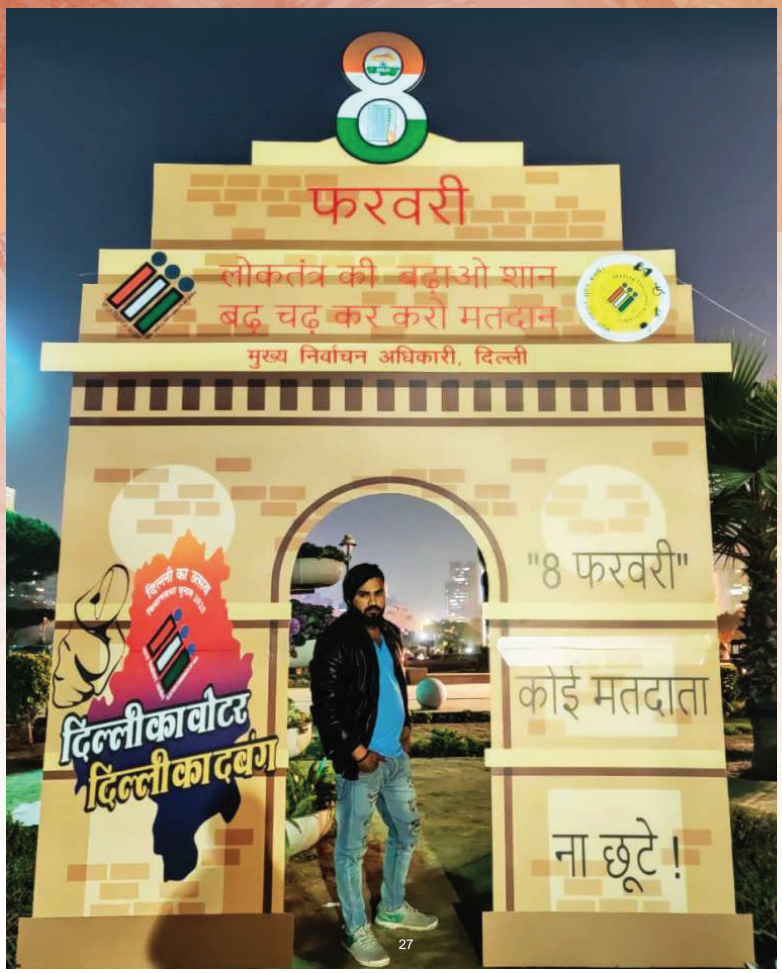
DELHI ASSEMBLY ELECTION 2020



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