



## ELECTION MANIFESTOS IN INDIA: BEYOND ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

*Ragini Kanungo\**

### ABSTRACT

Election manifestos are official statements of intended policies by political parties released during election campaigning. These documents cover a wide range of issues and present the plans, programmes and schemes of a political party that will be implemented if voted to power. The ultimate aim of such policy documents is to garner the support and votes of people. These manifestos being released and circulated in public are concrete proofs of the intention and plans of a political party, unlike the statements made in public speeches and rallies which are dramatized to keep the audience engaged with a candidate. However, despite the legal sanctity of any document written and attested in black and white, election manifestos escape this liability resulting in ‘promises’ and ‘freebies’ mentioned in the manifestos, which are forgotten after elections. Though certain guidelines are in force to counter the manipulation of voters by false promises mentioned in the election manifestos, these are not sufficient. Due to the fact that manifestos are often released prior to the commencement of elections, it does not become an electoral issue thereby restricting the powers of the Election Commission of India over the matter. This paper analyses the current scheme of regulation of election manifestos and discusses the possible solutions.

**Keywords:** Election, Election Manifesto(s), Freebies, Policy, Promise.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Election manifestos are often discussed and compared with each other in prime-time debates during elections. The policy framework, goals, programmes and schemes cited by political parties in their manifestos are circulated and communicated to the general public through different platforms. The issues addressed in election manifestos range from international policy to community-specific measures. All of these are meant to represent the political standing of a party, which helps a voter exercise his/her franchise by making a comparative choice and effective decision. However, in absence of proper regulation, election manifestos have been reduced to rhetoric documents aimed at manipulating marginalized, gullible populations by promising temporary benefits in the name of ‘freebies’.

Moreover, the contents of election manifestos also target sections of the society on the grounds of caste and religion promising special benefits to these communities. All of this form a part of the larger picture called ‘vote bank politics’. Despite being written in black and white, circulated in public, election manifestos do not have any legal implications on political parties, which results in flowery promises being made by parties to gather votes, often forgotten after

---

\* Fourth Year B.A. LL. B (I) Student, Amity Law School, Delhi - India.



elections. This paper aims at a critical analysis of the contents of election manifestos in India and guidelines in effect regarding manifestos. It suggests placing a legal obligation on political parties with respect to manifestos, taking inspiration from other countries around the world.

## II. ELECTION MANIFESTOS: THE MANIFESTATIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Free and fair elections are the heart and soul of a vibrant democracy. They lead to change in the government and policies.<sup>1</sup> The fact that people are able to choose their leaders is what makes this form of governance conducive to the modern world. In order to exercise their choice and vote, people need to have options to choose from i.e. candidates in an election. The policies, ideologies and promises made by political parties (represented by candidates) are what strikes a chord with the public and ultimately results in votes. While campaigning, public rallies and speeches are traditional forms of connecting with the voters, election manifestos have also emerged as a significant component of elections at the national, state and local levels.

The twentieth century saw certain changes in politics and election campaigning. With the rise and advancement of communication media, it became imperative for political parties to target voters in all ways possible. What was earlier a discursive process, whereby parties competing in elections only needed to set out broad principles, transitioned to an era of detailed policymaking and a promise of a roadmap to follow once elected in the office<sup>2</sup>. Thus, election manifestos were prepared by political parties, the contents of which were conveyed through newspapers, radio, television and nowadays social media.

‘Manifesto’ is derived from the Latin word ‘manifestum’ meaning clear or conspicuous.<sup>3</sup> According to the Oxford Dictionary manifesto means the public declaration of the policy and aims of a group such as a political party.<sup>4</sup> Election manifestos can be defined as “the official

---

<sup>1</sup> Irfan Ahmad, “Manifestos and Indian elections”, *ALJAZEERA*, April 15 2014, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/4/15/manifestos-and-indian-elections> (last visited on May 23, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Islam Muhammad, “Election Manifesto as a Unit of Analysis in Research”, *Research Gate* (2020), available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345499230\\_Election\\_Manifesto\\_as\\_a\\_Unit\\_of\\_Analysis\\_in\\_Research](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345499230_Election_Manifesto_as_a_Unit_of_Analysis_in_Research) (last visited on June 20, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Krishan Mahajan & Yogesh Singh, “Election Manifesto: Legal Reality or Illusion”, 1 *TNNLU Law Review* (2018).

<sup>4</sup> Election Manifestos, available at: <https://eci.gov.in/election-manifestos/> (last visited May 23, 2021).



statements of intended policy by political parties at the beginning of election campaigning”.<sup>5</sup> It is a published document containing a declaration of the ideology, intentions, views, policies and programmes of a political party. It serves as a reference document of a political party before the public and represents the collective internal consensus of the political party. The primary aim of an election manifesto is, however, to attract voters and ultimately succeed in winning elections.

Over the years, the contents of election manifestos have also seen a drastic change. It has transformed from a modest 150 words document to tens of detailed policy pages developed by experts.<sup>6</sup> Though a majority of the people do not read these manifestos, the ‘promises’ made by parties in these documents exert significant influence on the voting population. At the same time, it is also true that no political party has delivered one hundred per cent of its promises made in the manifesto after being elected to power.<sup>7</sup>

With the Bharatiya Janata Party (hereinafter ‘BJP’) government fulfilling its commitments of constructing Ram Temple in Ayodhya, abrogating Article 370 of the Constitution of India and enacting legislation to protect and promote cow, as made in the 2014 election manifesto, the importance of these policy documents has increased by several manifolds.

### III. ROLE OF ELECTION MANIFESTOS: NOT MERE POLICY DOCUMENTS

Election manifestos are seldom considered an integral part of free and fair elections. It is, however, important to understand that documented commitments hold higher authority than dramatic speeches made in rallies. Election manifestos play a crucial role in presenting the visions of parties in a democracy.<sup>8</sup> They serve as a compendium of the stance of political parties on issues of importance to the country and electorate. These manifestos serve as a basis to determine if a political party elected to power is delivering the commitments made to the voters at the time of election.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Supra* note 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Irfan Ahmad, “Manifestos and Indian elections”, *ALJAZEERA*, April 15 2014, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/4/15/manifestos-and-indian-elections> (last visited on May 23, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Atanu Biswas, “How much do election manifestos matter?”, *The Telegraph*, June 11 2019, available at: <https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/how-much-do-election-manifestos-matter/cid/1692165> (last visited on May 24, 2021).



Furthermore, the role of election manifestos does not come to an end with the end of elections, rather they are used to analyse the political environment at various stages of the five years that a party is in power. It can be categorised as follows:<sup>9</sup>

- Pre-election stage: At this stage, manifestos are studied from the perspective of motives, ideologies and determinants of mentioning a particular policy in the document.
- During the election stage: Manifestos are analysed with respect to the rhetoric and communication strategies, including sender, medium and receiver statistics as well as media coverage.
- Post-election stage: After elections, manifestos released by political parties serve as an instrument to ensure accountability and study the fulfilment of promises made.

Therefore, considering the abovementioned significance of election manifestos, it can be said that manifestos and programmes ultimately contribute to a healthy democracy.<sup>10</sup> However, considering the volume of contemporary election manifestos, it would take several weeks for an average voter to read them.<sup>11</sup> While India's literacy rate stands at 74.04 per cent, it is unknown if an average literate citizen is capable of comprehending complex socio-economic issues specified in the manifestos. In this context, it is important to do an in-depth analysis of election manifestos.

#### IV. CONTENT OF ELECTION MANIFESTOS: TARGETING THE VOTERS

The content of election manifestos targets voters and future voters of all categories. In addition to the basic ideology of the parties, major policies such as economic and foreign policy, plans, programmes and issues for governance form a part of the election manifestos. These include but are not restricted to measures such as ensuring comprehensive social security to those at special risk, making quality education affordable to everyone, waiving off agricultural loans, a pension scheme for aged and helpless farmers, provision of safe drinking water and primary healthcare etc.<sup>12</sup> Thus, manifestos take into consideration a wide range of issues from

---

<sup>9</sup> Islam Muhammad, "Election Manifesto as a Unit of Analysis in Research", *ResearchGate* (2020), available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345499230\\_Election\\_Manifesto\\_as\\_a\\_Unit\\_of\\_Analysis\\_in\\_Research](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345499230_Election_Manifesto_as_a_Unit_of_Analysis_in_Research) (last visited on June 20, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Supra* note 8.

<sup>12</sup> Election Manifestos, available at: <https://eci.gov.in/election-manifestos/> (last visited May 23, 2021).



international relations, national policy, inter-state cooperation to community-specific incentives. All this in turn helps political parties to attract voters by ensuring that their needs and aspirations are part of the list of promises they make.

A negative aspect of election manifestos or rather elections in India is its intrinsic focus on caste, community and religion-specific incentives, commonly known as ‘vote bank politics’. Considering the diverse population of India, political parties often target communities luring them with schemes for their temporary benefit in return for votes.

Irrespective of the incentives and programmes included in the election manifesto of a political party, it cannot work contrary to the provisions of the Constitution.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the contents of the manifesto i.e. the intended policy, programmes and schemes have to be in conformity with the Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy and other provisions of the Constitution of India.

#### **A. Theories of election policy and programmes**

Revolving around the content of election manifestos, various theories have been propounded by scholars to analyse and understand the policies and programmes by political parties which find a place in manifestos. The said theories are as follows:<sup>14</sup>

##### *i. Spatial Theory*

The central hypothesis of this theory developed by Anthony Downs is that there exists a reciprocal relationship between parties’ policy programmes, the policies of rival parties and voters’ policy preferences. However, these dynamics are significant only when public opinion is shifting away from the political party’s policy position.

##### *ii. Salience Theory*

According to the salience theory, when political parties compete in an election they emphasise specific policies or concerns more than others through their public statements i.e. election

---

<sup>13</sup> Krishan Mahajan & Yogesh Singh, “Election Manifesto: Legal Reality or Illusion”, 1 *TNNLU Law Review* (2018).

<sup>14</sup> Islam Muhammad, “Election Manifesto as a Unit of Analysis in Research”, *ResearchGate* (2020), available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345499230\\_Election\\_Manifesto\\_as\\_a\\_Unit\\_of\\_Analysis\\_in\\_Research](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345499230_Election_Manifesto_as_a_Unit_of_Analysis_in_Research) (last visited on June 20, 2021).



manifestos that correspond with the issues the public is interested in to win votes. This theory was developed by Budge and Farlie.

### *iii. Function Theory*

Propounded by Benoit, the function theory holds the belief that campaign communications have certain distinct functions that ultimately desire to win the elections. These functions are achieved by election manifestos to a large extent i.e. to acclaim positions, to attack an opponent, and defend in case of a past attack. Thus, election manifestos can be considered multi-functional policy documents in accordance with this theory.

## **B. Election manifestos from a Rhetorical perspective**

Political parties often employ emotive rhetoric and valence in their election manifesto. The use of such rhetoric is justified by the argument that it increases the appeal of the messages intended to be conveyed to voters. Employment of emotive rhetoric in manifestos depends on whether the policy positions communicated by parties are distinct or not.<sup>15</sup> The less distinctive policy position, the more likely is the use of positive emotive rhetoric and vice versa. This strategy is also employed in case a significant portion of voters is still undecided.<sup>16</sup>

It is also seen that if a party forms the government with a single majority, the use of positive sentiment in their election manifesto is higher than the opposition. However, if the political party is incumbent in a coalition, yet holding the prime ministerial role, they also tend to use positive sentiments in their manifestos higher than their coalition partners. It has also been noted that the use of positive sentiments is higher in extreme ideological parties.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, during economic setbacks, positive sentiments in election manifestos are decreased.

## **II. Analysis of Election manifestos: 2014 Lok Sabha Elections**

The 2014 Lok Sabha Election was a historic election, due to the magnitude of campaigning and subsequent results in which the absolute majority was secured by the BJP. The other major political party contesting the elections was the Indian National Congress (hereinafter 'INC').

---

<sup>15</sup> Islam Muhammad, "Election Manifesto as a Unit of Analysis in Research", *ResearchGate* (2020), available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345499230\\_Election\\_Manifesto\\_as\\_a\\_Unit\\_of\\_Analysis\\_in\\_Research](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345499230_Election_Manifesto_as_a_Unit_of_Analysis_in_Research) (last visited on June 20, 2021).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*



Though the ideologies and political outlook of both parties are diametrically opposite, a quick look at their election manifestos concerning the economic reform agenda shows remarkable similarities on FDI, Export, Import, Manufacturing, Taxation, Trade and Labour Issues.<sup>18</sup> While INC's manifesto was titled 'Your Voice Our Pledge for 2014-19', BJP's manifesto was titled 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat: Agenda for Development, Good Governance and Peace'. Both the parties promised new jobs in their manifestos, "millions of jobs" by BJP and "100 million" by INC. Similarly, both parties favoured a free-market economy, with minimum government regulations and oppose "black money". The manifestos of both parties were mentioned to fight against corruption and price rise. The word "quality healthcare" finds its place in both the manifestos. Both the parties promised education to all, and support 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. They also had a similar stance on "cross-border terrorism".<sup>19</sup>

The key points of difference in the manifestos of INC and BJP lie in the promises by the latter party under the title "cultural heritage" including the construction of Ram Temple at Ayodhya, abrogating Article 370, the passage of Uniform Civil Code and legislation to "protect and promote cow". Thus, it can be seen that in the Indian context the election manifestos of different political parties have similar policy approaches towards socio-economic issues, differing only in minute aspects. Likewise, most of the parties resort to sky-high promises and commitments in their manifestos, which are often forgotten after being elected into power.

## V. CRITICISM OF ELECTION MANIFESTOS: ILLUSIONARY PROMISES

In their true sense, election manifestos are intended to represent the goals, programmes and plans of a political party if elected to power. By comparing the manifestos of different political parties, it is expected that people will be able to make a choice amongst contesting candidates. However, under the garb of influencing voters, several parties make promises that are impossible to fulfil and attract voters by 'freebies' mentioned in their manifestos. These promises are usually targeted at groups of the electorate such as Below Poverty Line (BPL) families, weaker sections of the society, women, handicapped etc.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Krishan Mahajan & Yogesh Singh, "Election Manifesto: Legal Reality or Illusion", 1 *TNNLU Law Review* (2018).

<sup>19</sup> Irfan Ahmad, "Manifestos and Indian elections", *ALJAZEERA*, April 15 2014, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/4/15/manifestos-and-indian-elections> (last visited on May 23, 2021).

<sup>20</sup> Election Manifestos, available at: <https://eci.gov.in/election-manifestos/> (last visited May 23, 2021).



Several promises like ‘eradication of poverty, unemployment and corruption’ though claimed by political parties in their manifestos, do not see the light of the day. The compelling priorities of parties during elections are to win a seat, for which they capture the imagination of voters by promising ‘development’ and indicating its benefits by freebies.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, there are no consequences if a political party fails to fulfil promises written in its manifesto, they often find one or the other excuse for its inability to do so.<sup>22</sup> In such a scenario, manifestos become a formality, a mere photo-op in the campaign of political parties.<sup>23</sup>

Some political parties are also of the opinion that election manifestos are not necessary to connect with the voters. They do not release any manifestos and yet are able to win the election. An example would be the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) which believes that election manifestos are “hollow promises which are never realized”.<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting to note that the zeal with which plans and promises are propagated prior to elections, lacks at the time of their implementation during terms of office. Of course, the rebuttal to this is often cited that if the political party in power fails to implement its promises, it is up to the people to vote it out of office in the next elections.<sup>25</sup> Such an argument, however, does not suit a country like India, where a majority of the vote share comes from marginalized communities who are carried away by temporary temptations flung at them in the form of freebies.

On questioning the party in power regarding their inability to fulfil the promises made during elections, the natural calamities such as ‘unprecedented drought’, ‘severe cyclones’, ‘devastating floods’, ‘severe typhoons’, ‘whirlwinds’, ‘hurricanes’, ‘ghastly famines’ amongst

---

<sup>21</sup> Krishan Mahajan & Yogesh Singh, “Election Manifesto: Legal Reality or Illusion”, 1 *TNNLU Law Review* (2018).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Uzair Ahmad Khan, “Election Manifestos”, *iPleaders*, October 17 2019, available at: <https://blog.ipleaders.in/election-manifesto/> (last visited on May 24, 2021).

<sup>24</sup> Atanu Biswas, “How much do election manifestos matter?”, *The Telegraph*, June 11 2019, available at: <https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/how-much-do-election-manifestos-matter/cid/1692165> (last visited on May 24, 2021).

<sup>25</sup> N Pradeep Kumar, “Election Manifestos”, *Eastern Book Company*, available at: <https://www.ebc-india.com/lawyer/articles/875.htm> (last visited on May 24, 2021).





others are blamed.<sup>26</sup> However, it is a known phenomenon that one or the other calamity would strike a place in a year. It is the political parties who should take these calamities into consideration before presenting a ‘rosy picture’ and a ‘cosy life’ to the voters.

In the words of Mr Varun Gandhi<sup>27</sup>, “manifestos should be considered as a legal contract enshrining a country’s purported development agenda. For the health of India’s democracy, ensuring accountability for manifestos remains a key reform to be pushed”.<sup>28</sup> He further says that instead of helping parties swing voters, manifestos often morph into an intellectual and ideological exercise at best.

The present state of putting no obligation on the part of the ruling party for the implementation of commitments written in election manifestos, coupled with the short memory of uninformed citizens has reduced the policy document to mere rhetoric to hoodwink the credulous and gullible voters.<sup>29</sup> The Hon’ble Supreme Court of India and Election Commission of India have taken steps to overcome the malpractices by parties under the garb of manifestos.

## VI. ELECTION MANIFESTOS IN THE INDIAN SCENARIO: COUNTERING THE ILLUSIONARY PROMISES

In light of the practice of political parties making impossible promises and attracting voters by mentioning freebie schemes in their manifestos, the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India in *S. Subramaniam Balaji v. Government of Tamil Nadu & Ors*<sup>30</sup> held that although the promises in the election manifestos cannot be construed as ‘corrupt practice’ under section 123 of The Representation of People’s Act, 1951, the reality cannot be ruled out that distribution of freebies of any kind, undoubtedly influences as people.

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Member of Parliament, Pilibhit constituency.

<sup>28</sup> Varun Gandhi, “Political parties must be held accountable for their election manifestos”, *Hindustan Times*, May 21 2018, available at: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/political-parties-must-be-held-accountable-for-their-election-manifestoes-writes-varun-gandhi/story-B2r1PBSxNhqjqeh38tvGL.html> (last visited on May 23, 2021).

<sup>29</sup> N Pradeep Kumar, “Election Manifestos”, *Eastern Book Company*, available at: <https://www.ebc-india.com/lawyer/articles/875.htm> (last visited on May 24, 2021).

<sup>30</sup> (2013) 9 SCC 659.



Recognizing the post-election plight of helpless voters, the Apex Court directed the Election Commission of India to frame guidelines with regards to contents of election manifestos after consultation with all recognized political parties.<sup>31</sup> The guiding principle for framing these guidelines was as follows<sup>32</sup>:

- The distribution of freebies of any kind influences all people and shakes the root of free and fair elections to a large extent.
- Election Commission of India shall issue guidelines under the Model Code of Conduct in accordance with powers under Article 324 of the Constitution of India, to hold free and fair elections.
- As political parties usually release their election manifesto before the announcement of the election date, the Election Commission of India will not have any authority to regulate any act prior to elections. However, considering the fact that election manifestos are directly associated with the process of election, an exception can be made.

Thus, in consideration of the above guidelines by the Supreme Court, the Election Commission of India held a meeting with recognized National and State political parties for consultation with them on the matter. After taking note of the conflicting views, the Commission included 'Guidelines on Election Manifestos' in Part VIII of the Model Code of Conduct.

#### **A. Guidelines on Election Manifestos: The Model Code of Conduct**

In accordance with Part VIII of the Model Code of Conduct, the Election Commission of India directs all political parties to adhere to guidelines as follows, while releasing their election manifestos<sup>33</sup>:

- The election manifesto shall not contain anything repugnant to the ideals and principles enshrined in the Constitution and further, it shall be consistent with the letter and spirit of other provisions of the Model Code of Conduct.
- The Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in the Constitution enjoin upon the State to frame various welfare measures for the citizens and therefore there can be no

---

<sup>31</sup> Krishan Mahajan & Yogesh Singh, "Election Manifesto: Legal Reality or Illusion", 1 *TNNLU Law Review* (2018).

<sup>32</sup> Model Code of Conduct for the guidance of Political Parties and Candidates, available at: <https://eci.gov.in/mcc/> (last visited on May 24, 2021).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*



objection to the promise of such welfare measures in election manifestos. However, political parties should avoid making those promises which are likely to vitiate the purity of the election process or exert undue influence on the voters in exercising their franchise.

- In the interest of transparency, a level playing field and credibility of promises, it is expected that manifestos also reflect the rationale for the promises and broadly indicate the ways and means to meet the financial requirements for it. Trust of voters should be sought only on those promises which are possible to be fulfilled.

The Model Code of Conduct also provides for the prohibitory period of release of manifestos during elections as follows:

- In case of single-phase election, manifesto shall not be released during the prohibitory period as prescribed under Section 126 of the Representation of People Act, 1951.
- In case of multi-phase elections, manifesto shall not be released during prohibitory periods, as prescribed under Section 126 of the Representation of People Act, 1951, of all the phases of those elections.

The prohibitory period as prescribed by Section 126 of the Representation of People Act, 1951 is forty-eight hours ending with the hour fixed for the conclusion of the poll for any election in that polling area.

In addition to the above-mentioned guidelines, Section 127A of the Representation of People Act, 1951 may also be considered for the regulation of election manifestos. The said provision imposes certain restrictions on election pamphlets or posters, which can be interpreted to include manifestos as well in light of sub-section (3)(b). However, the restrictions are limited to the obligation to mention the name of the printer, publisher and compulsory declaration by the publisher of pamphlets and posters. The section does not delve into the contents of the pamphlets or posters, leaving this aspect beyond the clutches of law.

The Election Commission of India has often risen to the occasion to warn political parties against resorting to politics of freebies and promises in their manifestos.



### III. Steps taken by the Election Commission of India

The Election Commission of India has issued a warning to several parties whenever they are found to be acting against the guidelines laid for election manifestos. Some of the instances are as follows<sup>34</sup>:

- On May 14 2016, the Commission issued a notice to All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIDMK) pointing out that the promises made in its manifestos for the Tamil Nadu State election violated the guidelines.
- On January 16 2017, the Election Commission issued a notice to Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) concerning a statement during the Goa Assembly Elections asking voters to accept money being distributed by a political party, but vote for the symbol of AAP.
- On 6 March 2017, the Election Commission issued notice to Samajwadi Party for the statement of its Chief Minister at an election meeting during the Uttar Pradesh State Assembly Election asking the voters to keep the money distributed by others but remember his bicycle symbol for voting. The Commission convened a warning to the party after stating that public utterances which amount to encouraging bribery in elections are an electoral offence and corrupt practice.

Thus, while the Hon'ble Supreme Court and Election Commission of India has brought changes in election manifestos and their content, without a strong legal backing these guidelines remain a toothless weapon.

## VII. ELECTION MANIFESTOS AROUND THE WORLD: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

### A. United States of America

In the United States of America, the nature of political party platforms (election manifestos) is policy-based, generally covering economic policy, foreign policy, healthcare, governance reform, environmental issues, immigration etc. These do not offer specific benefits but outlines plan and policies that would benefit large groups of the population. The manifestos are mandated to be issued two months before election day. As there is no central Electoral Management Body (hereinafter 'EMB'), the State level EMB regulations generally do not include any provisions about political party platforms. It is the Party Committee that governs

---

<sup>34</sup> Krishan Mahajan & Yogesh Singh, "Election Manifesto: Legal Reality or Illusion", 1 *TNNLU Law Review* (2018).



internally and develops the platform of a party for a particular election, as per the Charter and Bye-Laws of the party. Thus, electoral authorities do not have any role with respect to election manifestos.<sup>35</sup>

#### **IV. United Kingdom**

The election manifestos in the United Kingdom tend to mention more concrete policy choices as well as their budgetary implications. At times, parties add financial paragraphs to their manifestos which may be submitted to the Court of Audit (if it exists), which calculates how realistic the manifesto is. The electoral authority issues guidelines for campaign materials, which also applies to manifestos.<sup>36</sup>

#### **V. Mexico**

In Mexico, to be eligible to nominate candidates for a Federal election, a party must submit an electoral platform (manifesto) for registration and validation by the Federal Electoral Institute (hereinafter 'FEI'). The platform must uphold three broad principles namely, politics, economy and society. The manifestos should be released five months before election day. Certification of registration and validation of the platform is essential for the nomination of candidates. Thus, in Bhutan manifestos can be regulated and have to be approved by electoral authority before their release.<sup>37</sup>

#### **VI. Bhutan**

In Bhutan, political parties are required to submit a copy of their election manifesto to the Election Commission, before the primary round of National Assembly elections. Manifestos are issued to the public only after approval by the Election Commission. The Commission thoroughly scrutinizes the manifesto and filters out any matter that can potentially undermine the security and stability of the nation. Moreover, manifestos cannot contain anything that seeks electoral gains on the grounds of religion, ethnicity, region, prerogatives of the King and the State etc. The election manifestos in Bhutan can be issued three weeks before the election day.

---

<sup>35</sup> Election Manifestos, available at: <https://eci.gov.in/election-manifestos/> (last visited May 23, 2021).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Election Manifestos, available at: <https://eci.gov.in/election-manifestos/> (last visited May 23, 2021).



Thus, like in Mexico, election manifestos in Bhutan as well are regulated by their electoral authority.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, as it can be inferred from the above different countries have a different role of electoral authority for regulating election manifestos. The loopholes in the Indian scenario can be remedied by taking inspiration from Mexico and Bhutan, who have a well-regulated framework for election manifestos.

### VIII. CONCLUSION: THE WAY AHEAD

Election manifestos are an integral part of free and fair democratic elections. They represent a concrete roadmap that a political party intends to follow on being elected to power. Unlike speeches made in rallies, election manifestos hold higher authority due to the fact that they are written in black and white, and circulated in public. The importance of election manifestos needs to be inculcated into the Indian electoral system, and parties need to be ‘realistic and pragmatic’ while preparing manifestos.<sup>39</sup> Statements and promises should not be made simply for gaining the limelight without the intention of implementing them. While the measures taken by the Election Commission of India under the order of the Hon’ble Supreme Court are commendable, there remains a gap between electoral promise and its fulfilment. It is thus, high time to ensure that legislative support is given to the guidelines on election manifestos and a legal obligation is placed on the political parties. Enforcement of these promises now needs to be adhered to by the parties. The sanctity of election manifestos needs to be conformed to by all parties, and failure to keep the promises must invite legal consequences in the form of restrictions on contesting elections. It is necessary to understand that there is a thin line difference between policy pledges and promises aimed at buying votes. Liability and accountability for such promises need to be ensured accordingly.

---

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> N Pradeep Kumar, “Election Manifestos”, *Eastern Book Company*, available at: <https://www.ebc-india.com/lawyer/articles/875.htm> (last visited on May 24, 2021).