

Welcome Move for GST Appellate Body

ET Editorials



The government's decision to create a national Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal to adjudicate disputes is welcome. It will help in faster resolution and also bring uniformity in the redressal of GST disputes. Reportedly, the tribunal will act as a forum for second appeal and decide cases where there are divergent orders by the authority for advance rulings at the state level. This will reduce the burden on high courts that have a huge pendency of cases. The tribunal, which will mainly adjudicate disputes relating to the so-called place-of-supply rules, will be akin to CESTAT that was created to hear appeals against

orders passed by Commissioners of Customs, Excise and Service Tax. The plan is also to set up three regional benches. The need is to appoint competent judges and have intelligent IT infrastructure to deal with cases that are referred to the tribunal.

Today, the facility of advance rulings for GST allows taxpayers to know their dues in advance, and helps reduce litigation. However, problems have surfaced due to conflict between rulings by different state authorities. Rightly, industry has been demanding the creation of a centralised authority for advance ruling. And the GST Council has seen merit in this demand. So, amendments needed to the GST Act should be done swiftly to remove any tax uncertainty for businesses. Appeals against contradictory rulings by the Authority for Advance Rulings should be disposed of quickly. Strengthening the dispute resolution mechanism is a must. At the same time, the GST Council should make the tax regime and rules simple for their transparent, consistent interpretation. Fewer and lower rates will minimise classification disputes, reduce the burden on the judiciary and boost GST collections, as well as direct tax collections, once GST data is mined.



दैनिक भास्कर

वित्तीय प्रशासन के ढांचे पर राजन के सुझाव विचार योग्य

संपादकीय

भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक के पूर्व गवर्नर रघुराम राजन ने वर्ल्ड इकोनॉमिक फोरम की बैठक के मौके पर दिए अपने इंटरव्यू में कई ऐसी बातें कही हैं, जिनकी ओर भारत सरकार और उसकी संस्थाओं को ध्यान देना चाहिए। राजन ने कहा है कि

भारत में जीएसटी लागू करने का कदम सही था लेकिन, नोटबंदी सही नहीं थी। सरकार और उसकी कमान संभालने वाले राजनेताओं को अपने व्यक्तित्व को पीछे रखकर व्यवस्था के हित के बारे में सोचना चाहिए। राजन की यह टिप्पणी भी महत्वपूर्ण है कि जीएसटी जैसा अच्छा कदम भी जुगाड़ के आधार पर चल सका, क्योंकि इस देश में जुगाड़ से ही सारा काम होता है। सरकारों से अपने स्वतंत्र कामकाज के कारण पंगा लेते रहने वाले राजन नेताओं के भले प्रिय न हों लेकिन, इसमें कोई दो राय नहीं कि वे भारत के हितैषी हैं और भारत का हित चाहने वाले प्रधानमंत्री चाहे नरेंद्र मोदी हों या डॉ. मनमोहन सिंह कोई भी उनसे निजी राग-द्वेष नहीं रखते। रघुराम राजन ने साफ कहा है कि भारत की भूमिका चीन से बड़ी है भले ही आरंभ में चीन भारत से आगे निकल गया लेकिन, अब वह पीछे जा रहा है। 2017 में चीन की अर्थव्यवस्था दुनिया में दूसरे नंबर पर थी जबकि भारत की अर्थव्यवस्था 2.59 खरब डॉलर के साथ छठे नंबर पर थी।

भारत की यह तरक्की तीव्र होगी लेकिन, इसके लिए जरूरी है कि वह अपनी रिजर्व बैंक जैसी संस्था को स्वायत्तता दे और आंकड़ों को विश्वसनीय बनाए। रिजर्व बैंक निश्चित तौर पर सरकार के मातहत काम करता है और उसका गवर्नर वित्त मंत्रालय के नीचे ही होता है। इसके बावजूद उसका दर्जा देश की नौकरशाही से ऊपर होता है। रघुराम राजन की यह अवधारणा भारत के उस वित्तीय प्रशासन के ढांचे को बदलने के लिए प्रस्तुत की गई है, जहां मंत्रालय का सचिव या प्रधानमंत्री कार्यालय ही सब कुछ होता है। भारत को अगर अपनी आर्थिक तरक्की तेज करनी है तो कोटा-परमिट राज के प्रशासनिक ढांचे से बाहर आना ही होगा। राजन की यह चेतावनी भी गौरतलब है कि राजनीतिक लाभ के लिए आंकड़ों से छेड़छाड़ ठीक नहीं है। इसलिए जीडीपी की दर और दूसरे सूचकांक के लिए स्वतंत्र एजेंसी का सहारा लिया जाना चाहिए। राजन की बात सैद्धांतिक तौर पर ठीक है और लोकतांत्रिक देश की बाजार अर्थव्यवस्था की तरक्की इसी तरह से हो सकती है।

आर्थिक आरक्षण और कृषि कर्ज-माफी की समानताएं

रोशन किशोर आर्थिक समीक्षक, हिन्दुस्तान टाइम्स

नरेंद्र मोदी सरकार द्वारा आर्थिक रूप से कमजोर वर्गों (ईडब्ल्यूएस) के लिए घोषित 10 फीसदी आरक्षण कई कारणों से किसानों की कृषि कर्ज-माफी की तरह ही है। इन दोनों से क्रमशः सवर्ण बेरोजगारों और किसानों को बहुत कम लाभ होगा। 10 फीसदी आर्थिक आरक्षण का मतलब यह कतई नहीं कि 10 प्रतिशत सवर्ण आबादी को नौकरियां मिल जाएंगी। अक्सर तो सरकारी और सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र में पैदा होने वाली नई नौकरियों का यह बहुत छोटा-सा हिस्सा होगा, फिर सरकारी नौकरियों की संख्या बहुत कम है और यह दिनोंदिन घटती ही जा रही है। उदाहरण के तौर पर, सेंटर फॉर मॉनिटरिंग इंडियन इकोनॉमी के आंकड़ों के मुताबिक, साल 2011-12 में (सबसे ताजा उपलब्ध डाटा यही है) हमारे देश के सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र में सिर्फ 1.76 करोड़ नौकरियां थीं। साल 2001-02 और 2011-12 के बीच सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र की नौकरियों में 12 लाख की कमी आई। इसी तरह, कर्ज-माफी से भी देश के सभी किसानों को फायदा नहीं होता है।

ऐसी योजनाएं साहूकारों आदि से लिए गए कर्ज को माफी के योग्य नहीं मानतीं। यहां तक कि औपचारिक क्षेत्र के सभी कर्जदारों को भी इसका लाभ नहीं मिलता, क्योंकि कृषि भूमि की मालिकाना स्थिति, कर्ज-सीमा और कर्ज की तारीख जैसे

कई आधारों पर किसान कर्ज-माफी से वंचित रह जाते हैं। किसानों के एक छोटे-से हिस्से को इसका लाभ मिल पाता है। पर मामूली लाभ के बावजूद आरक्षण और कर्ज-माफी, दोनों जबर्दस्त राजनीतिक अपील रखते हैं। ये दोनों भेदे प्रोत्साहन हैं। यदि कोई पार्टी कर्ज-माफी की वजह से राजनीतिक लाभ हासिल कर लेती है, तो वह कृषि क्षेत्र में ढांचागत बदलाव के लिए खास उत्साह नहीं दिखाएगी, क्योंकि ढांचागत बदलाव के लिए अधिक धन की तो जरूरत पड़ेगी ही, उसमें फौरी राहत की गुंजाइश भी कम होती है। मतदाता भी दूरदर्शी कदमों की बजाय लोक-लुभावन फैसलों को ज्यादा पुरस्कृत करते हैं। रोजगार के संकट से जुड़ा परिदृश्य इससे कुछ अलग नहीं है। इस संकट के दीर्घकालिक समाधान के लिए देश की शैक्षिक दुनिया में व्यापक सुधार की जरूरत पड़ेगी।

रोजगारपरक शिक्षा व्यवस्था में सुधार के लिए काफी संसाधनों, राजनीतिक इच्छाशक्ति और वक्त की दरकार होगी। ऐसे में, सामाजिक आधार पर मिलने वाले आरक्षण के दायरे के बाहर के लोगों की नाराजगी को शांत करने के लिए उन्हें आर्थिक आधार पर आरक्षण देने की घोषणा एक बेहद आसान रास्ता है। मगर इससे विपरीत परिणाम भी निकल सकते हैं। यह आरक्षण के अन्य आंदोलनों को भड़का सकता है और आबादी के अनुपात में आरक्षण की मांग सामने आ सकती है। कर्ज-माफी और आरक्षण, दोनों हमारे लोकतंत्र की लगातार गहराती गई कमियों को उजागर करते हैं। आजादी के पहले और बाद में हमारे देश ने किसी तार्किक सामाजिक-आर्थिक सुधार की तरफ कदम नहीं बढ़ाया। भूमि पर एकाधिकार, श्रम बाजार की विषमता जैसी ढांचागत कमियों ने सरकार के आर्थिक बदलाव की मौलिक दृष्टि को बेमानी कर दिया। फिर जाति-आधारित पेशागत बाधाओं ने भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था को उसकी विशाल श्रम शक्ति से वंचित रखा।

चीन और दक्षिण कोरिया आदि देशों में ऐसी स्थितियां नहीं थीं। निस्संदेह, भारत की संसदीय लोकतांत्रिक व्यवस्था इसके भाषाई व सांस्कृतिक मतभेदों के साथ मिलकर देश भर में सुधारवादी राजनीतिक शक्ति के आगे एक बाधा खड़ी करती है। इस व्यवस्था के तहत सियासी पार्टियां जाति समीकरणों के सहारे अच्छी-खासी संख्या में सीटें जीतती हैं। ऐसे में, कर्ज-माफी और आरक्षण जैसे कदम किसी वैचारिक सोच की बजाय विरोधी के हाथों वोट गंवाने के भय से संचालित हैं। इन दोनों में कुछ हद तक छल शामिल है। कृषि आय का सीधा टकराव कम मुद्रास्फीति की कवायदों से है और जब तक हमारी आर्थिक नीतियां ऊंची मुद्रास्फीति को झेलने की इच्छाशक्ति नहीं सहेजेंगी, यह समस्या बनी रहेगी। इसी तरह, निजी क्षेत्र में सरकारी हस्तक्षेप के बिना देश के श्रम बाजार की समानता की कोई भी कोशिश निरर्थक है, क्योंकि अब ज्यादातर अच्छी पगार वाली नौकरियां निजी क्षेत्र में पैदा हो रही हैं।

Not the EVM again

The accusers swap places with accused, and a contrived controversy goes on

S Y Quraishi, (Quraishi is former Chief Election Commissioner.)

The EVM debate is back — yet again! This is one controversy that refuses to die down, raising its head every few months. This time around, its epicentre was London. What was promised as a sensational demonstration of hacking by “cyber experts” from the US that would cause an earthquake ended as poor melodrama with an anti-climax. The “cyber expert” was one Syed Shuja, who claimed that he had taken asylum in US after he and his colleagues were fatally attacked since they knew too much about the “hacking” of the 2014 General Election and were countering it. Several persons, including his teammates, were murdered, he alleged, for the same reason. The “facts” mentioned by Shuja can be independently corroborated and I am sure concerned agencies would be doing their homework, as they must. I will stay with the debate about the hackability of EVMs.

There is a well documented history of such claims. Besides individuals, every political party has raised doubts about these machines at some time or the other and demanded a return to the ballot paper. But they have also won elections with the same machines. Can ballot papers really change the picture? In July 2010, when the Telangana agitation was at its peak and 12 MLAs of the Andhra Pradesh Assembly resigned and recontested the by-elections on the issue, that was the time when the agitation against the EVMs was at its peak, thanks to the BJP’s campaign against EVMs. As the EC had turned down the request of political parties led by the tech-savvy Chandrababu Naidu to revert to ballot papers, the parties resorted to a smart ploy.

Since EVMs are configured to take only 64 candidates, the TRS decided to field more than 64 candidates in each constituency. While Yellareddy in Nizamabad district recorded the maximum of 114 nominations, Sircilla stood second with 107. Even after the large-scale rejection of nominations, the number of candidates left in the fray in six constituencies exceeded 64. This forced the EC to conduct elections in those constituencies by ballot paper, while the remaining six were conducted with EVMs.

As CEC back then, I took it as an opportunity to test and demonstrate the relative strengths of the two systems. While the results from the EVMs came out in four hours, those with ballot papers took 40 hours. On top of that, thousands of invalid votes inevitably happened with ballot papers. In addition, the cost of paper ballots and the prolonged drudgery of the polling staff was an additional burden. What’s more, the results from both systems were exactly the same. So what did they achieve with all the fuss? Zero!

Where did different political parties stand then? “The party (TRS) is opposing the usage of EVMs because it has reliable information that the Congress will try to manipulate the machines to win the polls,” said a newsmagazine report. TDP president N Chandrababu Naidu demanded that ballot papers be used in all 12 constituencies. “We have brought to the notice of the EC several times in the past that the EVMs were not tamper proof”, he said. Bandaru Dattatreya, president of the BJP in united Andhra Pradesh, said “We have been demanding that there should be a nationwide debate on EVMs. The TRS has used the right strategy”. Congress spokesman Kamalakar Rao said it was unfortunate the parties were doubting the EC’s integrity, forcing it to incur additional expenses to print ballot papers. Kahan gaye woh din?

Post 2014, the BJP has been repeatedly accused of misusing EVMs, though nothing has ever been proved. One prominent leader even claimed the EVMs could be hacked in just 90 seconds! On the other hand, the EC has repeatedly challenged the conspiracy theorists to try their hand on the EVM. No party has accepted the hackathon challenges. It is important to remember that the decision to adopt the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) was taken in 2010, when, in the wake of the BJP’s campaign against EVMs, an all-party meeting made this demand, which the commission immediately accepted.

The two factories which manufacture the EVMs were asked to develop VVPAT machines. The committee of independent experts was requested to monitor the process. After a series of trials culminating in two full-day election simulations in five cities in extreme climatic zones in 2011 and 2012 (Thiruvananthapuram, Jaisalmer, Leh, Delhi and Cherrapunji), the VVPAT was introduced, initially in 20,000 polling booths, where the first batch of the machines was used successfully. As the manufacturing progressed, all the booths in all constituencies started using these printer-based machines.

The Supreme Court in 2013 lauded the EC's decision to bring in the VVPAT for removing all doubts from the minds of the voters and directed the Government of India to ensure adequate funds so that the general election 2019 could be held entirely with these devices. Since 2015, all state assembly elections have been held using VVPAT machines. In these elections, slips generated by nearly 1,500 VVPAT machines were counted and tallied with the votes in the EVMs. They all tallied. Not one mismatch. This shows the VVPAT is the final solution.

A performance review undertaken by the EC in mid 2018 showed an aggregate VVPAT malfunction rate of 11 per cent. This is higher than the rate for EVMs which is around 5 per cent. There is an easy technical explanation for this — EVMs are solid state machines while VVPATs are electro mechanical devices with moving parts. The analogy that can be used is that of a calculator (solid state, trouble-free for years) and that of a computer printer (prone to jamming, drying up of toner etc). The solution lies in keeping more machines as reserves for quick replacement so that voting can resume and there is no disturbance at the polling booths.

In the last few days, some Congress leaders have been heard demanding that all EVMs must be linked to VVPAT and 50 per cent of VVPATs be counted. While the first is already being done, the second suggestion can be discussed. The current practice of counting just one machine per constituency in my view needs to be reconsidered. I was told by the then CEC O P Rawat that the EC had asked the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, to suggest what would be the most scientific sample size that will lead to 99.99 per cent public satisfaction. What can be more reasonable than this? Let that be the clincher in the debate.

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Those we take for granted

Anganwadi workers, teachers, nurses are paid low salaries, their work devalued

Kiran Bhatta, Dipa Sinha, (The writer is assistant professor (Economics), School of Liberal Studies, Ambedkar University.)

Frontline workers providing basic services through various government programmes form the backbone of the country's social welfare system. India's ability to achieve its SDGs or to have a healthy skilled workforce that contributes towards economic progress or social and human development depends to a large extent on the performance of teachers, nurses, anganwadi workers, panchayat secretaries and PWD staff. That is perhaps why they have been at the receiving end of the criticism for shortfalls in the

country's social indicators. Unfortunately, while the blame is easily apportioned, there is not enough attention paid to the conditions under which they work or the value that is attributed to their work.

These workers face a number of obstacles in doing their daily jobs — lack of infrastructure, poor training, interminable bureaucratic reporting responsibilities, no supportive supervision, absence of clear accountability structures (to the community they serve as well as to the higher-ups), poor grievance redress mechanisms and for a majority, less than commensurate remuneration. These concerns are usually covered up in the narrative of rampant absenteeism and poor attention to core responsibilities. It is based on the assumption that all government employees are paid according to the Pay Commission scales. Nothing could be further from the truth, at least as far as the frontline government employees are concerned.

Let us take the example of anganwadi workers. There are almost 14-lakh anganwadi workers in the country providing health and nutrition services to over eight crore beneficiaries. They provide a long list of services, ranging from teaching pre-schoolers to visiting homes of young children for nutrition and health counselling. Despite the importance of the work, their positions are considered “honorary” and their emoluments kept out of all norms of minimum wages and pay grades. In most parts of the country, anganwadi workers get about Rs 5,000 a month, which is less than the minimum wages and even these small salaries are often irregular and delayed. A study of six states by the Centre for Equity Studies in 2016 revealed that 35 per cent of the workers had not received their previous month's salary, 50 per cent of the workers felt that the funds they received for running the day-to-day activities of the centre were inadequate and 40 per cent reported spending their own money to keep the centre's activities going.

Another example is that of government school teachers. With salaries presumed at Rs 40-50,000 a month and upwards, their lack of commitment to teaching is seen as unpardonable. While there is truth in the fact that teachers devote less than desired time to teaching, what is less understood are the reasons for this. The reality is that low financial allocations to the education sector have meant that state governments cannot afford to hire teachers at the Pay Commission scales. Therefore, over the years, they have hired fewer teachers, leading to huge vacancies, or resorted to various forms of contractualisation that allows them to circumvent the norms. As a result, salaries, in fact, range from Rs 3,700 per month to Rs 50,000 per month, for the same post and quantum of work in the same school. A case filed by teachers in Gujarat, showed that some of them were being paid less than even the minimum wages. Despite the Gujarat High Court ordering a revision of their pay scales, the matter had to come to the Supreme Court, where it has been awaiting a judgment for four years.

In a recent visit to a Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre (NRC) in Madhya Pradesh, a staff nurse appointed on a full-time basis (also doing night shifts) was found to have a salary of just Rs 10,000 a month — information that is not available in the public domain. Similarly, RTIs filed by one of the authors, on the salary structures of teachers across all states, has come a cropper. It appears that this basic information is not collected in any systematic manner by any of the states, or by any national data collection agency.

After the RTE banned contract teachers, non-regular teachers were no longer referred to as contract or para teachers, but in fact continue to function as such. Their contracts are “permanent”, but their terms are not that of a regular government employee. And, like the anganwadi, school teachers are saddled with a host of administrative work. The spectre of shortages, non-teaching duties and low pay indicate a rapid de-professionalisation of teaching and de-valuing of their core responsibilities. If the crisis of performance in these sectors is to be addressed a closer look at their governance architectures is necessary.

An electoral intervention that has clicked

Improvements to the EVM are certainly possible, but a return to paper ballots is an untenable proposition

Srinivasan Ramani



The implementation or evaluation of any policy decision must consider not just abstract reasoning but base it on empirical and historical evidence. This holds true for the debate on the question of persisting with the electronic voting machine, or EVM, in the Indian electoral process. Much has been said by commentators and political party representatives about the futility of using the EVM because of the possibility of electoral fraud by manipulating the technology that drives the machine. Informed critiques of the EVM and its handling have helped in some ways, one of them being the universal

implementation of the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) that allows for a layer of verification to the electoral process.

Misrepresentation

But more often than not, there have been accusations made about the EVM that do not stand up to scrutiny or reality, primarily made by political parties that have chosen to blame EVM manipulation as an easy excuse for their losses in various elections. Also, despite there being barely any shred of evidence to show that any election held recently was subject to electoral fraud through a manipulation of EVMs, and repeated assurances by the Election Commission of India (ECI) of the robustness of the administrative and technical safeguards in place to prevent EVM tampering, the swirl of accusations refuses to die down.

While glitches and machine failures have been reported or misreported as outcomes of “EVM hacking”, administrative errors in transporting the machines have been presented as evidence of tampering. The fact that glitches being reported have gone up is true enough. The replacement rate for machines deployed in the by-elections of Uttar Pradesh in 2018 went up to as high as 20% because of failures — primarily of the VVPAT machine that is adjunct to the control and ballot units of the EVM. These glitches had caused difficulties in conducting polls in the Karnataka Assembly elections, in May 2018, as well. But there were specific reasons for these.

Complex layer

The introduction of the VVPAT to allow for a paper count of the registered votes has also added a level of complexity to the otherwise simple technology that runs the EVM. The VVPAT was also rushed into service because of the constant carping about the possibility of EVM hacking by political parties. The

VVPAT failure rates were high early on in elections held in late 2017 and early 2018, with hardware issues occurring during transportation and exposure to extreme weather conditions. The ECI sought to correct these problems by repairing components related to the printing spool of the VVPAT machines and the deployment of many corrected machines in the three Assembly elections held recently — Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh — resulted in much reduced replacement rates (close to 2.5% in Madhya Pradesh and 1.9% in Chhattisgarh). This suggests that the ECI is relatively better prepared to handle VVPAT-related glitches in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The VVPAT's introduction and use is also necessary to address doubts related to the possibility of EVM hacking despite the safeguards in place.

Checks and balances

The ECI has reassured us many a time that the simplicity of the architecture of the EVM (software written onto a one-time programmable chip; standalone machines that are not networked; the lack of any frequency receiver or wireless decoder that will allow for communication externally; and advancements in newly deployed machines that allow for self-diagnostics to render the machines tamper-proof among other things) has helped it evade some of the misgivings experienced by EVMs used in other countries.

Combining this with administrative safeguards that allow for rigorous checks at various levels, such as after manufacture, during deployment, and so on; randomisation of deployment of machines, a listing of candidates in alphabetical order rather than on party basis on ballot units; sealing of machines by political party representatives after polling and storing in high security “strong-rooms”, the ECI has asserted that all these have made tampering impossible.

With these safeguards in place, it would require “insider mischief” by officials of the ECI, or by employees of the EVM manufacturers (Bharat Electronics Limited and the Electronics Corporation of India Limited) or the introduction of Trojans (malicious software) at the chip burning stage (a process currently outsourced to overseas firms) and which remain undetected by the manufacturers during their “first level checks” of the firmware, to create problems. Critics of the EVM suggest that there is a non-zero possibility of such ways that will result in the deployment of tampered EVMs susceptible to manipulation. These are far-fetched but technically possible scenarios that assume malicious actions by vendors that are deliberately ignored by the manufacturers, “insider fraud” that remains undetected, and coordinated actions by agents who manage to shift vote counts in favour of their party using the manipulation that is possible with the tampered EVMs.

More about the VVPAT

Fortunately, the implementation of the VVPAT as a device has rendered it possible to verify if at all such schemes have happened to subvert the mandate of voters. VVPATs will help find if there is anything malicious that has gone on by comparing machine tallies with the hand-counted tally of the slips. Currently, the ECI allows for the votes recorded in the VVPAT to be counted in only one randomly chosen polling booth in each Assembly segment. Statisticians such as Atanu Biswas of the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, and former bureaucrat K. Ashok Vardhan Shetty have argued that this is not enough. Mr. Shetty has suggested that a more robust count of VVPAT slips would entail the setting of a State-wise number of the booths to be counted, that is adjusted for population, voting turnout and other factors. This is a legitimate suggestion that the ECI should pay heed to in order to dispel any lingering doubts about the electoral process.

That being said, the idea that EVMs should be junked because of the possibilities mentioned above and that we should return to paper ballots as the means of voting is not just problematic but is also an ahistorical argument. In a recent paper, researchers such as Shamika Ravi et al have shown that the use of EVMs had led to a significant decline in election fraud such as rigging, booth capturing, ballot stuffing, etc in many States and even resulted in increased voter turnout especially of the vulnerable and poorer sections of the Indian electorate. I had found, in a statistical study for The Hindu in April 2016, that not only had EVMs rendered “invalid votes” to be a complete non-factor but also invalid votes had significantly affected several Assembly elections in the past.

In other words, the EVM has served the purpose which was the reason for its deployment by the ECI in the first place — to assure free and fair elections, and to ease the process of voting. Improvements to the EVM are certainly possible, but a return to paper ballots is an untenable proposition. In sum, the best possible way of improving upon our electoral process and bringing in greater trust in it is in a continuing and constructive critique of India’s EVM through a scrutiny of the election process including technical assessments of the devices used. But there should be no place for an uninformed dismissal of the EVM as a part of the discourse as this will only increase distrust in our democratic process.
