

Corruption and Election in Conflict Northeast India

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ABSTRACT: *Democracy largely depends on the modus operandi of electioneering practices. Most of the politicians usually adopted various techniques and strategies to get their ends beyond electoral integrity. One or either form of corrupt practices appears widely in India's northeast too which greatly demeans democracy. In the backdrop of various demands of different ethnic-based insurgencies, elections are also conducting in regular interval in this India's Northeast. This study is based on quantitative and empirical methods through SPSS interpretation. Sources of data were mainly from structured questionnaire collected on the basis of random sampling method from electorates of India's northeast. In contemporary, many insurgent groups have been interfering in the elections since they entered peace dialogue with government of India. This paper attempts to analyse corrupt practices and modus operandi of electioneering practices. Majority of electorates were also on the whims of perpetrators. The state of democracy in India's northeast is clear example of flawed democracy where elections are in servitude.*

Keyword: *electoral integrity, corruption, electoral rights, malpractice, conflict, threat, intimidation, dole for vote.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Most of the countries are also facing the corruption issue and gradually pervading all spheres of activities where politicians are main accused. Corruption affects in all round development and certainly demeans democracy. Politicians generally bear the brunt of these accusations. The perception is that they are capable of influencing each and every decision within government or para-statal bodies. True, corruption is internationally recognised major issue in the society endangering the stability and security of societies, threatening social, economic, political development and undermining values of democracy. Ban Ki-Moon rightly stated that corruption undermine democracy and the rule of law. It leads to violate human rights. It erodes public trust in government. It can even kill. 'Many countries that are rich in oil, gas and other minerals are nonetheless mired in poverty and beset by poor government because the public revenues earned from selling these resources have been squandered through corruption and lack of government accountability.' (Ban Ki-Moon 2007) In countries where corruption exists in a high scale, political stability and good governance are very suspicion as possibility of undemocratic situation and anarchy is high. (Hope 2000) Many of us do not seriously consider it though we often talk to eliminate corruption. Indeed, the more money invested in elections would result the more corruption. Logically, what they invest capital should be returned with interest is their perception. To return the investment, many illogic and immoral acts will eventually be brought up and directly or indirectly effect value system. It is found that as more than just paying bribes: almost two-third people believe that personal contacts and relationships help to get things done in the public sector in their country. (Morung 2013) Now the issue of India's northeast is somewhat differ from other rest of Indian states. Yes, we agreed that, being a conflict region, in the past when insurgency was at its peak, several ministers were also reputed to be profiting from the extortion rackets run by insurgent groups which was noticed by National Investigation Agency. (India Post 2013) Different instances of involvement of insurgent groups in electoral politics where they made effort to elect those candidates who are loyal to them are also becoming a new dimension. With this view, former Governor of Manipur often mentioned politicians-nexus with insurgent groups for mutual benefit.

In contemporary, many insurgent groups have been interfering in the elections since they entered peace dialogue with government of India. In the backdrop of various demands of different ethnic-based insurgencies, and ethnic conflict, elections are also conducting in regular interval in this region. They often made attempt to nominate their candidates who have loyal to them. This is the way how democratic process converts into phenomena of servitude and flawed democracy in this region. It is often said that threaten and intimidation from various quarters disturb the freedom of choice and in turn it develop a foundation of flawed democracy. Various factors associated with conflict, homeland and sovereignty affects electoral integrity. Significantly such malpractices are becoming a normal practice in elections and exacerbating democratic value in India's northeast. In such a situation, most of the politicians usually emphasised immoral politics. Free and fair elections may not be claimed in the real sense that one or either form that closely associated with corrupt practices demeans democracy. On the other hand corruption leaves no visible trace, no bloodstain, it is a crime shrouded in secrecy. This paper attempts to analyse corrupt practices and modus operandi of electioneering practices that largely affect on electoral integrity.

II. METHODS AND LIMITATION

With this concept of electoral integrity this paper is trying to accentuate the context of India's northeast. Indeed, analysis is based on quantitative and empirical methods through SPSS interpretation. For the understanding of conceptual background of the electoral integrity and corruption, secondary data are also depended. Sources of data were mainly from structured questionnaire collected on the basis of random sampling from electorates of India's northeast excluding Sikkim. Altogether 860 respondents: Arunachal Pradesh – 124; Assam – 138; Manipur – 140; Meghalaya - 92; Mizoram - 113; Nagaland – 131 and Tripura – 122 made the universe of this study. But many electorates and stakeholders have still hiding their faults; instead it is seemingly developed a new culture of electoral politics. Logically, intimidation and threat may have certain impact on the freedom of choice but it is very nuance as the finding shows relatively different from hypothetical assumption and witnesses. In corrupt practices, as both the counterparts giver and taker have involved and liable to punished, the possibility to prove genuinely is also very doubtful. Besides, the present study has limitation on the corrupt practices that appear on the eve of election which mean electoral malpractices within its electoral cycle.

III. CORRUPTION

According to Nye it is behaviour which deviates from the normal duties of a public role because of private-regarding, pecuniary or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence. This includes such behaviour as bribery; nepotism; and misappropriation. (Nye 1967: 417) Indeed, corruption as a social problem is evaluated in terms of structure, process and resultant. On the other hand corruption generate from incompatibility in important respects of economic and political system. Thus, sometimes corruption is also considered as more than criminal problem. At the same time, the scandal of corruption, in one country or another, is never far from the surface. 'If a state of corruption is endemic, there are still important differences in the degree of corruption, as between one country and another, or at different times in the same country. Thus, the difficulty in producing a satisfactory theory of corruption is not so much in accounting for the phenomenon as such (with its 'locus' in political economy) but rather in specifying the conditions under which corruption either seriously affects the behaviour of elected or appointed officials (from empirical observation) or is only a minor factor in making or carrying out decisions'. (John 1997) Perhaps, there is no consensus on definition of corruption.

Transparency International defines 'corruption as behaviour on the part of officials in the public sector, whether politicians or civil servants, in which they improperly and unlawfully enrich themselves, or those close to them, by the misuse of the public power entrusted to them. This would include embezzlement of funds, theft of corporate or public property as well as corrupt practices such as bribery, extortion or influence peddling'. Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigating Bureau (CPIB) provides a very simple definition - Corruption is the asking, receiving or agreeing to receive, giving, promising or offering of any gratification as an inducement or reward to a person to do or not to do any act, with a corrupt intention. The World Bank and other international institutions tend to restrict corruption to the abuse of public office for private gain. 'In the political realm, it undermines democracy and good governance by subverting formal processes. Corruption in elections and in legislative bodies reduces accountability and representation in policymaking; corruption in the judiciary suspends the rule of law; and corruption in public administration results in the unequal provision of services. More generally, corruption erodes the institutional capacity of government as procedures are disregarded, resources are siphoned off, and officials are hired or promoted without regard to performance. At the same time, corruption undermines the legitimacy of government and such democratic values as trust and tolerance'. (Government of Mauritius 2008) The United Nations Interregional Crime & Justice Research Institute identifies three main types of corruption - corruption in public administration; business corruption; and high-level corruption of political, administrative and financial centres of power. (UNICJRI 2013)

But, the present study will emphasise election related corrupt practices as defined by Representation of People Act 1951 and its follow up amendments that may be mentioned: *Bribery* – (A) any gift, offer or promise by a candidate or his agent or by any other supporter of any gratification, to any person whomsoever, with the object, directly or indirectly of inducing a person to contest or not to contest or an elector to vote or refrain from voting at an election. (B) the receipt of, or agreement to receive, any gratification, whether as a motive or a reward to influence their electoral behaviour to change their decision. *Undue influence* - any direct or indirect interference or attempt to interfere on the part of the candidate or his agent or of any other person with the consent of the candidate or his election agent, with the free exercise of any electoral right: threatens any candidate or any elector. *Appeal to electorate to refrain from voting or on ground of discrimination, religion, sex, caste, community...* The promotion of, or attempt to promote, feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes... propagation of practice of sati, attempt to personal character or conduct of any candidate, free conveyance of electors for the purpose of vote... expenditure in contrivance of section 77. (Representation of the People Act, 1951 and amendment, Act 27 of 1956)

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURES

Various literatures studied on corruption are found where all the studies were based on different perceptions from political, social and economic backgrounds. Interconnection in between corruption and democracy is rooted and evidenced that few persons tried to control and swindle the national resources by raising the slogan of democracy. (Moreno 2005) It is often, powers are misused by the responsible government officials for illegitimate, usually secret, individual or private gain makes public institutions totally corrupt which is political corruption. His analysis shows that corruption is also a rampant on the eve of elections in most of the countries even in the developed countries. (Ignacio 2013) Jose Vidal-Beney to argues that when 'the principal political forces, in complete mafia-style harmony, coordinate among themselves to swindle the citizens', the result is a discrediting of democracy, a rejection of politics, a rise in abstention, and, more dangerous, growth of the far right. He concludes: Government grows corrupted by corruption, and when there is corruption in democracy, democracy becomes corrupt. (Abdul 2009) In the case of US election, they started with fund raising campaign by the candidates of Democratic and Republican parties. Corruption in various form are experiencing like misuse of authority and bribery takes it 'legitimate' berth during this electoral cycle. In the same way, in India too, huge amounts are flooded on the eve of election which is cleared. Moreover, Indian system somehow allows corrupt politicians and bureaucrats to stay in power. It is not surprising that many states in India, normal administration performed by paying the usual illicit charges. 'That is the exact position in Indian democracy wherever one goes. Corruption gets institutionalized when politicians, parties and bureaucrats amaze wealth earned for their 'nationalistic and patriotic' services to nation and people'. (Ibid)

Warren has analysed political corruption and opined that with few exceptions, political corruption has been conceived as departures by public officials from public rules for the sake of private gain. He further rightly argued that 'Corruption in a democracy involves duplicitous violations of the democratic norm of inclusion. Such a conception encompasses the standard conception while complementing it with attention to the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within democratic politics. (Mark 2004: 803) Various studies acclaimed 'as the abuse of public office for private gain', whether pecuniary or in terms of status. (Cooper et al., 2006: 121-36; Bardhan 1997: 1321) The gain may accrue to an individual or group, or to those closely associated with such an individual or group. It is generally considered that corrupt practices include bribery, nepotism, theft, and other misappropriation of public resources. (Lambsdorff 1999: 3-4; Nye op cit.,: 419; Shleifer and Vishny 1993: 599) Whereas, Christopher Korale opined that corruption is in two main folds i) it is an abuse of an influential position for private gain, ii) it is an exploitation of a system for securing unmerited advantage. (Deryke 2001) Some argued that democratisation influences political corruption. Certain aspects of democratic process like party-based competition, free and fair elections motivates political elites candidates on the path of immoral and unethical way to prevail over their rivals through dole for vote or other malpractices. (Hung 2004: 179; Little 1996: 64-70; Johnston 1997: 61-82) Another argument that contradictory said that '...multifaceted process affecting corruption in numerous and sometimes conflicting manners, statistical analysis have mostly detected a linear and negative democracy corruption association. (Goldsmith 1999: 865; Sandholtz and Koetzle 2000: 31-50; Treisman 2000: 399-57)

In a democracy, corruption involves various damages that corruption harms democratic characters undermining the powers of speaking and voting like freedom of speech, free and fair election. In fact, corruption diminishes the impact of voting and representation system that it reduces the public influence of voice and deliberation. (Mark 2006: 803-07) In regard to the deteriorating conditions of corruption in India, Sumit Ganguly wrote that 'Bribes simply became the currency of everyday transactions extending from the awarding of major governmental contracts'. (Sumit, 2011) In India, corruption is systemic, not opportunistic, as in most other countries. Without corruption, politics would come to a halt, democracy would cease to work. (Bureau 2013) In the matter of electoral integrity, challenges of electoral integrity reflect universal problems which may damage the legitimacy of contests in any country -- in Britain, (House of Commons Library (2012) the United States, and Canada (Reuters 2011) as well as in Egypt, Kenya and Russia. 'One reason for this broader understanding is historical: issues of electoral integrity have long been of concern in Western democracies, exemplified by problems of endemic bribery and treating during nineteenth century Britain, (Susan et al., 2012) progressive attempts to clean up machine politics in Tammany Hall, (Gosnell 1968) restrictions on the electoral franchise for women and the working class in Europe, (Raffaele 1998) practices of voter suppression and racial discrimination in the United States, (Alexander 2009) and the introduction of compulsory voting and the secret ballot in Australia. (Marin 2001) Confidence in the electoral process, popular participation, and even regime legitimacy are thought to be corroded by such practices. (Sarah 2008: 305-20) Besides, such malpractices are seemingly high in conflict states. It is widely feared that in the absence of these conditions, for instance in states holding elections as part of the peace-building process, such as Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, flawed contests may heighten the dangers of instability, violence and even civil war. (Mark and Philipp 2007) It is therefore important to understand the nature of these challenges and what can be done to avoid these problems which is inclusive elements of electoral integrity.

In support of this conception, recent events that countered electoral integrity may be mentioned including mass protest in Moscow following Vladimir Putin’s re-election to the Presidency, by violent unrest in Tahrir Square directed against the results of the first round presidential contest in Egypt, and by deadly inter-communal violence in post-election Nigeria were witnessed. Various reports suggest that many other elections are commonly marred by problems of different malpractices. It is also agreed that election alone is not a single yardstick of democracy and even free and fair elections sometimes claimed but no doubt various malpractices associated with electoral cycle. (Ali 2010) The dole for vote may even claimed as an investment to be profited from or remade through extra-legal income, so indirectly it becomes a form of corruption. ‘Similarly with campaign finance, it can be seen as an early bribe given to candidates for services required by the donor in the future. Statistical manipulation is generally done by present governments to retain their power, so if a government is able to carry out indirect corruption there is a high chance it will carry out direct corruption too’. (Ibid) On the other hand corruption is widespread in immature democracy. (Pellegrini and Gerlagh 2008) Their findings suggest that the relationship between democracy and corruption, as discussed in the relation of corruption to democracy also supports the same. It can be argued, that even in the most developed democracies corruption still exists. However, the important thing to note is that the quantum of corruption changes. In another analysis Susan Rose opined ‘Democratic elections are not invariably a cure for corruption’. She argues that there is great pressure on the politician in terms of campaign finance in democratic elections, and wealthy interests are willing to foot the bill. In addition, some politicians try to make up the money they have spent, and in Japan politicians who assist local companies in obtaining government contracts expect a percentage of the price in return. (Qui 1996: 231)

V. CORRUPTION AND MALPRACTICES: NORTHEAST INDIA

5.1 Dole for vote

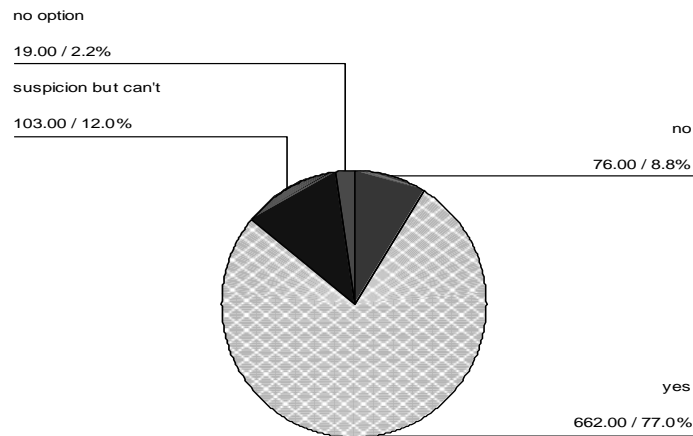
In one or other form, corruption may come up on the eve of election despite electoral laws said that (The Representation of the People Act 1958) ‘any gift, offer or promise by a candidate or his agent or by any other person with the consent of a candidate, or his election agent of any gratification, to any person whomsoever, with the object, directly or indirectly of inducing to make certain changes willingly or unwillingly to fulfil the connivance or perpetrators’. On the other hand, dole for vote became a serious issue in elections, whether it may be in different modus operandi like distribution of goods, cash or even promise to gratify particular electorates or family just after election. As both the counterparts giver and taker have involved and liable to punished, the possibility to prove genuinely is very doubtful. But it is cleared that more than two-third of candidates have often been attempted to lure electorates by unfair means. See the following bar chart (*no some of them 377 + yes all of them 210 = 68%*)

Table 1: Whether all the candidates in your constituency involved in dole for vote?



Most of the candidates have always in misconception and committed politics of destruction. On the other hand, majority of electorates were also on the whims in the sense that they have readily accepted the odds. That 77% of electorates were aware of such dole for vote which meant many of them might be in the net of this corrupt practice.

Figure 1: Have you heard distribution of case or goods on the eve of election



5.2 Way of transit

When it enquires whereabouts the information for dole for vote came in to the electorates, 59% respondents hinted that they got information from the agents/friends while those who said ‘eye witness’ of dole for vote was 15%. Very unexpectedly, information obtained from spouse was very low with just 4%, despite it claimed 16% from family or relatives. Thus the analysis confirmed that such malpractices are mainly carried out through election agents/workers.

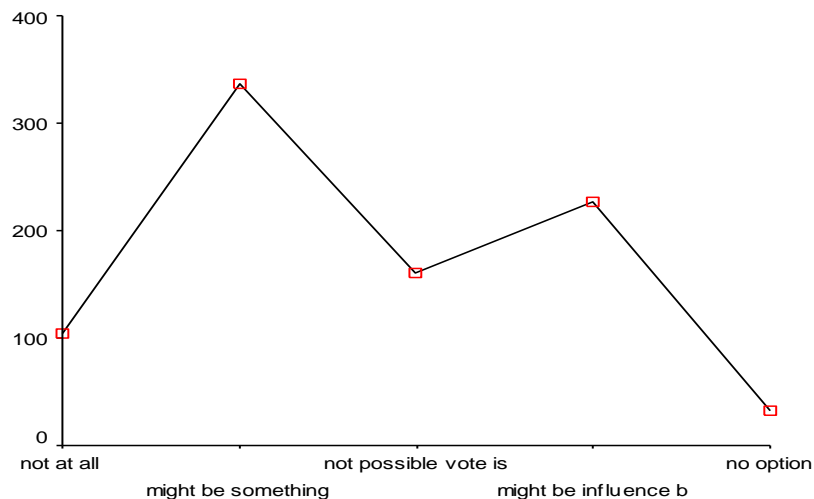
Table 2: From whom you got information of dole for vote?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	family /relatives	139	16.2	16.2	16.2
	friends /agents	512	59.5	59.5	75.7
	eye witness	131	15.2	15.2	90.9
	spouse	36	4.2	4.2	95.1
	no option	42	4.9	4.9	100.0
	Total	860	100.0	100.0	

5.3 Quantum of influence

Significantly, how far it can influence the electorates will be very remarkable since 39% respondents positively said it might be influenced something but 12% respondents denied it saying it cannot influence and supported it by 19% respondent that ‘to whom vote for’ was already decided so influence by dole for vote may not be possible. On the other hand, those who got more amount or goods from different candidates might be influenced termed by 26% respondents. The finding confirms that majority of the respondents believed that dole for vote will influence decision of the electorates to some extent.

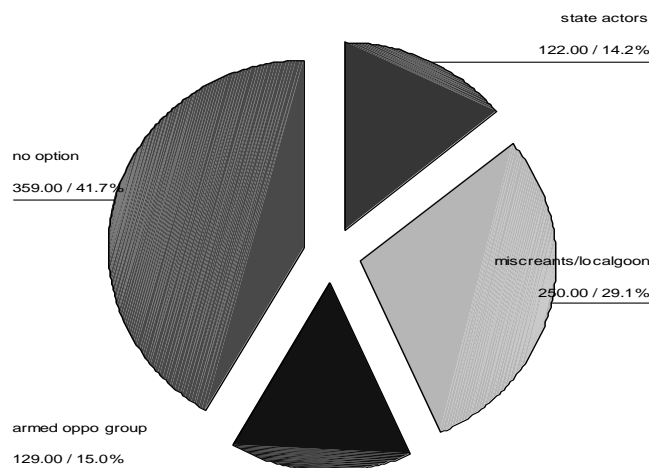
Table 3: Do you feel, such dole for vote might have influence the decision to whom vote for?



5.4 Threat to party or candidate

Threats or intimidations to follow their (armed opposition groups AOG) diktat to the particular candidates or party are not an exception in this region. It is witnessed by various reported news and appearances: Indian National Congress (INC) has alleged the Naga People's Front (NPF) of using insurgents /AOG in their favour and resorting to all sorts of election related crimes in the recently held Manipur state legislative assembly elections 2012. (Hueiyen 2012a) Trinamul Congress president Kim Gangte said ‘Voters in the hill districts failed to get their franchise... had been paralyzed and manipulated by militants’. (Hueiyen 2012b) One executive member of Senapati District Congress Committee was severely assaulted by NSCN-IM on 26 January 2012. The Kuki militant groups, which are under Suspension of Operations (SoO), and the NSCN-IM, which is also under peace-talks with the Centre were openly involved elections. The Kuki militants openly supported the INC candidates, while NPF was supported by the NSCN-IM. Involvement of the AOG in the election and threaten electorates and challenges to electoral rights is no doubt will remain as so long is proved by the existence. (Staff 2012). A conglomeration of valley AOGs in the valley, CorCom (the Coordinating Committee consisting of different armed groups like KCP, KYKL, PREPAK, PREPAK (Pro), RPF, UNLF and UPPK.) targeted to defeat INC. After banning the INC indefinitely and issuing warnings against INC workers to desist from election related works, the CorCom launched a series of bomb attacks on INC offices and residence of workers. (Editor 2012) Admitting the involvement of NSCN-IM in election matter, Home Minister P. Chidambaram said NSCN-IM is in talks with the Government of India. It is also true that NSCN-IM cadres along with some other organisations continue to indulge in kidnapping and some time violence. (PTI 2012) The finding shows that most of the respondents 42% do not want to make comment while miscreants/localgoon disturbed electoral integrity by 29% respondent.

Figure 2: Which actors disturb electoral integrity?



5.5 Threat to electors and supporter

Threats or intimidations on particular individual elector or group of electors were also found on the eve of elections. The modus operandi of intimidation might be any act of bullying or coercive force to make behavioural change of electors, for instance, intimidation to support or not to support particular candidate or party, or not to involve in any electioneering activities which is attempt to curbe freedom of electorates. In short, it is violation of electors’ right who is supposedly to enjoy freedom of choice to exercise their conscience and wisdom to elect the worthy candidate. Such intimidations often appear in many parts of India’s northeast though the frequency is accordingly different. Let see a comparative scenario of India’s northeast where Assam and Manipur experienced the most endanger that they have aware of such threat, 67 % and 58 % respectively and as per the respondents Arunachal Pradesh is quite better amongst northeast. Significantly, it is still very doubt that many respondents of Nagaland has psycho fear to say what they had experienced in the sense that 24% has made ‘no option’.

5.6 Coercive influence by threat

The crux of this issue in many of us is how it will be possible that elections are confidential. No one has the right to violate such personal secrecy. Such appearances of threat, intimidations are mostly found in armed conflict states or naxalite affected states of India but it doesn’t claim free from other states. The study found many respondents believed that such diktat may be somewhat influenced to decide their votes in the sense that 50% respondents favoured on this argument. On the other hand, 11% respondents opined it cannot influence as since voting is confidential, while 14% respondents argued that threat or intimidation can be influenced. In

experienced, though the AOG threaten to INC, the party got absolute majority in the recent Manipur state legislative assembly elections 2012. It is very contradictory in between the data found and people's assumptions. As per data given below it has strongly supported that 64% (somewhat influence + fully influence) believed on influence factor while the election result proved uninfluenced.

5.7 Freedom of choice

In contemporary, malpractices are very great deal to all the electoral studies, but attempts to find out an acceptable argument is not an easy task that almost all the malpractices are multifaceted and seemingly claimed as acceptable in one or either form. For instance, election code of conduct and other relevant laws of the state are being instructed to maintain certain rules, but candidates and workers have often indulged in illicit activities. It is also very unfortunate none of us have no serious for freedom of choice instead it is being treated as electoral politics. Majority of the respondents 59% agreed that illegal practices on the eve of elections disturb freedom of choice while 28% support the view partially.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARK

One of the core issues is how corruption affects democratic governance, in democracy all the citizens are suppose to enable free expression, choice on all matters. By the way democratic ethics is to allow the unrestricted exercise of the freewill of the people in certain conditions. But what we are experiencing in modern days is not free from such democratic norms that various forms of interference have been seen. In general developmental process is handicapped in an atmosphere of political instability. Thus, from the above analysis and findings shows that the state of democracy in India's northeast is clear example of flawed democracy where elections are totally in servitude. Corruption undermines the values of democracy and morality. Corruption breeds a sense of unfairness that conflicts sharply with democratic principles of equality of treatment. Formal processes laid down by law are subverted in favour of secret and undisclosed processes based on illicit advantages. Electorates of this region cannot decide their franchise instead influenced by various corrupt practices. Indeed, sustainable or real democracy is unthinkable without respecting human value and dignity of the individuals. In an ideal setting, political parties, political elites and for-runners should not indulge in immoral and unethical politics though it is not an easy task where politics is always associated with power game. Violation or external control to freedom of choice / franchise is unacceptable from the legal or moral point of view and it is great concern of democratic value. The human rights that guarantee everyone a comprehensive legal protection and an equal opportunity to pursue her private life-plans clearly have an intrinsic value. In an ideal setting, political parties basically are expected to serve as a formidable democratizing force by articulating and aggregating public opinion and interests, engendering popular participation, and promoting political education and national integration. (Shola 2010: 125-45) Violation or external control to rights, whether it may be in civil, political, and economic rights is unacceptable from the legal or moral point of view. Indeed, all these malpractices are against the electoral integrity that eventually destroys democratic value.

I acknowledge my humble gratitude to the authority of UGC New Delhi for giving me an opportunity to discuss the issue of Electoral Trend under the Major Research Project Grant.

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