

**The first polls were held over 5 months, from October 1951 to February 1952**

**18,000 candidates were in the fray for 4,500 seats**

**Of these, 489 were Lok Sabha seats**

**176 million people were registered to vote**

## A Revolutionary Idea

It was **Dr BR Ambedkar** who advocated voting rights for all adults, irrespective of class, caste or educational status. The move was revolutionary for a country where the majority was illiterate villagers. Ambedkar first proposed the idea in 1928, when Western democracies had still not embraced it. He stuck to the proposal during Constituent Assembly proceedings and found support in Jawaharlal Nehru.

*"My feeling is that every man is intelligent enough to understand exactly what he wants. Literacy has not much bearing on this point: a man may be illiterate, none the less he may be very intelligent"*



*"If any person raises his hand to strike down another on the ground of religion, I shall fight him till the last breath of my life, both at the head of the government and from outside"*

Jawaharlal Nehru, while on the campaign trail



*"In Asia, as in America, I know no grander vision than this, government by the consent of the governed"*

Chester Bowles, then American Ambassador to India

## The Ambitious Exercise

**3,80,000** reams of paper used to print ballot papers

**3,89,816** phials of ink were used to mark voters

**2 million** ballot boxes were made out of 8,200 tonnes of steel

Sites were chosen to set up **2,24,000** polling booths

**16,500** clerks were recruited on a six-month contract

**56,000** officers were selected for supervision

**2,80,000** volunteers and **224,000** policemen were deployed

**3,000** films were shown around India to educate people about elections

## Unsung Hero

Running the show was Chief Election Commissioner **Sukumar Sen**.

The Indian Civil Services officer was chief secretary of West Bengal, before being put in charge of the daunting task of conducting India's first two general elections. The mathematics gold medalist executed this successfully, even saving the exchequer ₹4.5 crore in the next elections because he had stored 3.5 million ballot boxes from the first. He was subsequently invited by Sudan to oversee their first general elections



## Gender Bender

Sen had to deal with many unique challenges. One was the enrolment of women. Women in north India were reluctant to give their names for the electoral rolls as they were used to being known as xyz's wife or mother. So they had registered the same way. When he read this, Sen was outraged and ordered this to be corrected. This eventually meant 2.8 million women were struck off the rolls. But in subsequent elections, most of the women registered with their own names



## A "Symbolic" Race

Since India's literacy level in 1952 was around 16%, the Election Commission allotted a separate ballot box for each candidate in which people could cast their vote. Each box had a unique colour, the candidate's symbol and name and the voter just had to drop their paper into the box. Symbols included a pair of bullocks, a hut and an elephant



## How They Fared

The winner in the Lok Sabha was the Congress, with **364 seats**

Runners-up were **CPI** (16 seats) and **Socialist Party** (12 seats)

**Bharatiya Jan Sangh** (BJP's predecessor) managed just 3 seats



## The Parting of Ways

The practice of holding simultaneous elections continued in three subsequent general elections held in 1957, 1962 and 1967. This cycle got disrupted with the dissolution of some legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969 (Haryana, Punjab, UP, Bihar, West Bengal, Nagaland and Pondicherry). In 1970, the Lok Sabha was itself dissolved prematurely and fresh elections were held in 1971

Sources: Factly.in, Election Commission of India, Rediff.com, The Indian Express, The Hindu, India Today