Compulsory voting is the obligation to vote and is often referred to as 'duty to vote'.

In India, compulsory voting means the obligation to vote in general elections to the Lok Sabha (the lower house of the Indian Parliament) and to state or local legislative assemblies.

**What does compulsory voting mean?**

Compulsory voting means an obligation to vote, i.e. "obligation to vote". It shall be the duty of a qualified voter to cast his vote at elections failing which he will be liable to penalty or be declared as a "defaulter voter".

The supporter of compulsory voting argues that citizens who live in a democratic state have a duty to vote for the proper functioning of democracy.

Compulsory voting in India:

In 1951, the idea of including compulsory voting was brought into the Constitution but was rejected then. In 1990, the Dinesh Goswami Committee also rejected the idea of compulsory voting on the grounds of difficulties in its implementation. Another Private Member Bill for the same purpose was introduced in 2009 was again rejected on the ground that active participation in a democratic setup must be voluntary not coerced.

In 2004, the Compulsory Voting Bill, 2004 was introduced as a Private Member Bill proposing compulsory voting for every eligible voter to vote provided with certain exemptions like illness etc. The Bill did not receive the support of the House and was not passed.

Since the right to vote is a legal right as well as constitutional right, compulsory voting may be in violation of the fundamental rights of liberty and expression guaranteed to citizens in a democratic state. And if the constitutional right to vote may be interpreted to include the right to not vote, compulsory voting in that case violates the Constitution.

In the opinion of Law Commission, "electoral right" of the voter includes the right to "vote or refrain from voting at an election."

Compulsory voting should always be provided with some safeguards like the right to exercise the NOTA option (not to vote for any candidates who are contesting the elections), opportunity to be heard in case of failure to vote, exemptions for certain individuals e.g. physically incapable due to illness or other similar reasons.

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**COMPULSORY VOTING IN OTHER COUNTRIES**

Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Luxembourg, North Korea, Peru, Singapore, Uruguay and Switzerland also have a provision for compulsory voting. The penalty for violation includes an explanation for not voting and a fine.

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**RIGHT TO VOTE VS COMPULSORY VOTING IN INDIA**

In India the right to vote is provided by article 326 of the Constitution and the Representation of People's Act, 1951, for every citizen of 18 years old, subject to certain disqualifications.

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