Elections are an indispensable process of democracy—the manifestation of propels right to govern themselves. There is a saying that people get the government that they deserve. Using one’s franchise may be a deliberate decision, but how does a voter arrive at a decision in casting his vote for a party or a candidate is not so simple. What are the considerations which influence his decision—caste, colour, creed, religion, family, peer pressure, personality of a candidate, party platform, propaganda or mass media? Is it one factor or all put together, questions such as these have intrigued the sociologists, political scientists, communicators et al all along. With the proliferation of mass media, their accessibility and wider reach, they have become a handy tool for politicians and political parties in reaching out to a large audience at a speed unknown a few decades ago. Conscious of the power of the “pen”, the media over the years have exerted tangible influence on the political process of societies where they enjoy freedom of speech and expression. Whether the media should restrict themselves to the role of informing and educating the society on issues that are crucial to the people or set agenda for larger debate and deliberations, are issues on which different people have different views. One thing, however, is for sure that media have become an inevitable part of the political process especially during elections.

In the present study it is proposed to analyse the patterns of influence, role and impact of mass media during the election campaigns in the United States, Germany and India. The choice of the countries was made by the fact that, the USA in one sense is seen as an evangelist, committed to political democracy and in another, somewhat pejorative sense is referred to as world’s “gend’arme”. Germany, on the other hand, has had a chequered history—the growth of fascism between the two World Wars, division of the country, democratization of West Germany under the pressure of the allied powers and eventually the unification of the east and west Germany, the beginning of the joint political process, is yet
another paradigm to be understood which includes its electoral process, campaigning techniques, the media mind specially in the erstwhile regimented German Democratic Republic (GDR), the electoral behavior of the people of the new German laender in comparison with the old states etc. India, world’s largest functioning democracy, with an electorate at a whopping 500 million, has managed to survive in this part of the world, with occasional jerks and jolts, notwithstanding.

There is no doubt that the three democracies, under study, located in three different world regions and bearing variegated positioning in the global scene, are political democracies, but their electoral systems and procedures, modes of financing the elections and mass media reach & accessibility bear little resemblance.

Following hypotheses underscore this Study:

a) There is a growing disinterest bordering cynicism among the people in politics and political institutions in liberal democracies;
b) Political parties are being rendered ineffective as the mass media has usurped their traditional role of reaching out to the electorate;
c) Mass media tends to take on an activist role especially during the elections;
d) Smart campaigners and politicians “manipulate” the media to get coverage;
e) Early opinion polling indulges in “horse race” aspect of elections thus discouraging serious and honest politicians from contesting and also dissuade some voters from using their franchise;
f) There is an unholy nexus between politics and industry especially when it comes to financing the elections and the media have kept the issue alive;
g) because of varying socio, economic and literacy levels, the electorate in various countries think and act differently.

_The study is based on empirical research involving broadly, the following techniques:_
• Random sample survey of a cross section of electorate in Delhi for the 1991 mid-term parliamentary election;

• content analysis of major media input by various political parties in the USA, Germany and India in their respective elections held in early 1990s;

• in-depth study of various opinion polls in the three countries for analysis and comparisons of the media content on random basis in the three countries to know their focus on various issues and biases, if any;

• review of literature;

• in-depth interviews with a cross section of academics, politicians, strategists, leading pollsters, policy makers and media personnel in all the three countries under study; and browsing through of Home Page on Worldwide Web through the Internet in USA voting behaviour of the three electorate in the countries under study.

Limitations of the study:

The subject is mammoth and no effort can be considered exhaustive. The three countries under study provided varying challenges to the present researcher; there was a sea of information available on the American election. There is a general feeling in the USA that an average American hates politics. The enormous documentation, books and research papers which are published immediately after an election is over, is yet another aspect of the American society. Hence data collection never proved a problem. In India, not much serious documentation or post election analysis of academic nature except for journalistic writing was available. As far as Germany was concerned, the field visit and meetings with a cross section of people compensated for what probably was not accessible as an academic input.
Chapter One deals with the electoral process in the USA, Germany and India. From the very complex American system to a relatively simpler German and Indian process, the overview delineates how and at what point of time the play of big money and the role of mass media became pervasive in the system in all the three democracies. It also provides a bird's eye view of the elections held in all the three countries in the early nineties. As far as the USA is concerned, the Presidential election of 1992 has been studied in depth. The present researcher got the opportunity to witness the last round of electioneering of the 1996 Election while being on a field trip to the United States. Hence some analysis of the two elections has also been made. For Germany, the Federal election of 1994 has been studied. As the researcher was able to visit a number of German Laender both in the east and western parts, she got the opportunity to speak to a cross section of concerned people about the first election after the unification, held in 1990 and how it compared with the 1994 election. Glimpses of such views have been provided. For India, the mid term polls held in 1991 have been covered. As the 11th General election has also been held, some analysis shots have been provided. In all the three democracies, the role of media in the election process was discussed, deliberated and at times resented by politicians, scholars and academics.

The Second chapter, Mass Media, Public Opinion and Democracy: contemporary mass media scene in the USA, Germany and India provides a perspective on the inevitable interdependence of mass media and democracy for their survival. The chapter outlines the current mass media scene, reach and accessibility in the three countries under study. Media world is sans boundaries and thanks to satellite communication, election in any country is no more a national issue. The USA surpasses among the liberal societies for the longest election campaign which spans over a year and looking at the near monopoly of the US in satellite communication industry, there is an obvious impact of American elections all over the Globe. The trend of “Americanization” of elections is felt in democracies and in way is not considered a welcome development.
How does a voter decide about casting his vote, what influences his voting behavior- his caste, color, creed, religion, party propaganda, personality of the candidate, party platform or media stimuli around the election time are issues which have intrigued social scientists and researchers all along. Is there an average voter, is the subject matter of Chapter Three. Reaching out to the minds of the people may be the most challenging tasks because it is believed that people change their minds often. To explain why elections produce varying results may probably be an exercise in near futility, because the domain of the mind is difficult to gauge and the crosscurrents around the election time. Nonetheless one could study various factors which could possibly govern the voting behavior of the electorate and analyze the patterns over a period of time. Do early opinion polling affect the voting behavior of the masses and to what extent. The chapter seeks to address such as these.

Chapter Four undertakes a study of the themes, issues and strategies employed by various players including political parties and interest groups to seek public attention. Media also played their part in focusing certain issues while sidelining others. What issues were considered important by the public, a perspective has been provided. No system can be perfect for all times, so is the case with the electoral system. Politics they say is a power game. when the stakes are high, it is only natural that at times means fair and not so fair are employed to seek high offices. Of the various malpractice's, the role of money power has come to acquire the center stage. Media have played the role of a beam light, if not a crusader in keeping the issue live. Chapter Five takes a look at the various systems of election funding in the three democracies under study, the part Federal funding in the United States, elaborate state funding in Germany and no governmental funding of the Indian elections as of date except an allowance of one time free exposure in the Government controlled electronic media to the national parties. Whatever the official source of funding, money from unauthorized sources to the parties and candidates has become an eyesore in the societies and of those concerned the media in particular have kept the issue in public focus.
Chapter Six outlines the major findings, trends and observations and a scope for future research in the field.

In summation, the effort has been to study the possible impact of mass media in the election process especially, the voting behaviour of the electorate in three democracies and study, areas of common perceptions, attitudes and behaviour of masses and institutions.