

Voting behaviour in rural areas of West Bengal: A case study on Kushmandi Block of South Dinajpur District

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1. Introduction

Voting is a process for country or group that depends on general election, such as a meeting or an electorate to make a decision or express an opinion often following discussions. To establish democracy voting is also held in all the institutions within its purview. Voting is considered to be the most important and basic element to democracy. It is an ultimate activity through which citizens are equipped with the knowledge of politics and learn how to exercise their power. Elections provide the citizens and opportunity to directly or indirectly participate in the decision making process for the making and unmaking of governments. Voting is a special instrument, which acts upon the individual to express his "opinion on the candidates, parties and issues confronting socio-economic and culture in particular and political system in general". Voting seems to be the voluntary act but sometimes it is induced by some factors like influence of fellow-caste men, village notables, family heads or a political broker or stimuli generated during the election campaigning.

2. Meaning of Voting Behaviour:

The term 'Voting Behaviour' is not a new one. But it has been used to describe certain areas of study and types of political system which previously had either not been concaved or considered irrelevant matter. Voting behaviour is not confined to the examination of voting statistics, records and computation of electoral shifts and swings. It also involves an analysis of individual psychological processes such as perception, emotion, and motivation. Their relation to political action as well as of institutional patterns, such as the communication process and their impact on election. In the words of J.C. Plano and Fred W. Riggs said "Voting Behaviour is a field of study concerned with the ways in which people tend to vote in public election and the reasons why they vote as they do". The term 'Voting Behaviour' has been recently expected in meaning and is taken as one major and board area of study subsumed within the broader designation of political behaviour. It involves a study of human political behaviour in the context of voting in elections. Voting Behaviour studies open windows on the minds of the millions of people who are involved in the political process as voters. These constitute an important area of political science in which theory can be systematically and qualitatively measured and tested.

3. Research Objectives

The main purpose of this study is to examine the voting behaviour of the electorate in the elections to evaluate the nature of rural voters on Kushmandi Block of South Dinajpur

District. In this study, I want to analyze a brief overview of the voting behaviour in rural areas of West Bengal and emphasize the need to advance and understanding the particular area on Kushmandi Block of South Dinajpur District and explain the most important characteristics and components that should be available in voting behaviour during elections. Kushmandi Block of South Dinajpur District has some important factors that influence the behaviour of voters. The following research objectives are to be highlighted with some current issues such as:

- (i) To highlight the historical background of party system in India.
- (ii) To analyze the historical background of Lok Sabha elections in India.
- (iii) To identify the basic component of election that influences the behaviour of voters.
- (iv) To identify the impact of those components that voters who select the candidates from the election.
- (v) To identify the basic factors that influence in choosing the candidates.
- (vi) To understand the role of voting behaviour during elections in the West Bengal context.
- (vii) To understand the special characteristics of voting behaviour during the involvement in election.
- (viii) To know the effectiveness of forecasting of voting behaviour in pre and post election results.
- (ix) To identify factors influencing voting behaviour during elections.
- (x) To find out the problems of elections in India.
- (xi) To determine the role of media in moulding voting behaviour.
- (xii) To discuss the constitutional provisions regarding the power and functions of the election commission of India.
- (xiii) To show the active role of Election Commission during the election.

4. Research Hypothesis

The word 'Hypothesis' is a compound of two words 'hypo' means 'below or under' and 'thesis' means 'reasoned theory of rational viewpoint'. Accordingly, hypothesis would mean a theory which is not fully reasoned. In other words, hypothesis is a theory entertained in order to study the facts and examine the validity of the theory.

As far as my study is concerned, the hypotheses are:

- (i) Voting behaviour plays an active role during election in all democratic states.

- (ii) Theoretically, as far as a socio-psychological tradition is concerned demography is responsible to determine the voting behaviour.
- (iii) With regard to the policies framed by the government from time to time have a greater role to influence voting behaviour.
- (iv) Role of Election commission is more effective to measure the voting behavior.
- (v) As far as previous experience is concerned the voting behavior has been moulded by the money and muscle power especially in the rural areas.
- (vi) Voting behavior is also responsible to determine the role of political party both at national - regional level and their existence.

5. Geographical Profile of South Dinajpur District in West Bengal

The district of West Dinajpur came into existence in August 1947 with the partition of Bengal. The West Dinajpur District was further divided into two districts w.e.f. 1st April in 1992 into North (Uttar) Dinajpur and South (Dakshin) Dinajpur District. South Dinajpur District has two sub-divisions Buniadpur and Balurghat and this District was created by the division of West Dinajpur. In this district, there are some large and small towns which are Balurghat, Kushmandi, Gangarampur, Kumarganj, Tapan, Buniadpur, Harirampur and Hilli. The language of the people in South Dinajpur District is Bengali and they spoke each other local languages (like Barendri) in Bengali. Mainly two religious communities Hindu and Muslims are living. According to census of 2011, the District was the least population's one in the West Bengal and the total population is 16, 70,931 (Census 2011) of South Dinajpur District and the sex ratio in the district is 954 female per 1000 males. Balurghat College and Gangarampur College is the most popular college and other colleges are Balurghat Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Balurghat Law College, Buniadpur Mahavidyalaya, Dewan Abdul Gani College, Kumarganj College, Kushmandi Government College, Hili Government College, Gangarampur Government Polytechnic college etc. South Dinajpur District is predominantly an agricultural based area and there are plenty of rivers flowing through it, like the Purnabhaba, Brahmani, Atrayee and Tangon. However there are no large scale industries here. It is

recognized as one of the most backward regions of the country. South Dinajpur District has lots of Folk Culture such as Natua, Jang Gan, Mokha Dance, Halna-Halnami, Bisliha, Satyapir Gan, Jalmangal Gan, Khaja Gan, Chorchunni. The people belong to this area are peace lovers and fraternity is the key element among their relationship.

6. Voting Behaviour in Rural Areas of West Bengal: A Case Study on Kushmandi Block of South Dinajpur District

"India lives in its villages"- Mahatma Gandhi. Our economy is developing fast, Industries and big corporate are going globalised, with liberalization, tremendous changes are being felt in IT, manufacturing, Service sector, but **nobody thinks of the rural development** to make it as fast as in these sectors. **One man one vote** or **one person one vote** is a system of voting in which every person in a group or country has the right to cast their vote, and in which each individual's **vote** is counted and has equal **value**.

The study of voting behaviour is a recent effort in the context of Kushmandi Block in South Dinajpur District even though I have done through correlating with the electoral politics such as peoples' opinion, participation of campaign, party identity, election issue and all social and political changes. In this study, I want to highlight the voting behaviour in rural areas of West Bengal especially in the Kushmandi Block. However, the involvement of election and the personalities of the candidates and party identity were the main factor that influences the choice of the Kushmandi Block in South Dinajpur Districts. In this Block voter were influenced by the political or non-political factors such as – kinship, issue of candidates, promises of candidate and pre-election to election related matters and all political party were not considered while making voting choice for local regional issues by the voters.

For doing this work I have done a case study by preparing one questionnaire which includes a lot of things regarding the various aspects which influence the voting behaviour in the particular block. I have collected data from 200nos. of common people and 100nos. of political representatives.

This information has been collected on and from 05.02.2018 to 23.02.2018

Responses of the Common People:			Responses from the Political Representatives		
Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)
Are you interested in Politics?	48	152	Are you interested in Politics?	92	08
Are you active in Politics?	52	148	Are you active in Politics?	92	08
Is voting a Political Right?	164	36	Is voting a Political Right?	86	14
Your view on the importance of Voting	116 (Very imp.)	84 (Important)	Your view on the importance of Voting	64 (Very imp.)	36 (Important)
In your opinion, your pol. Representative would be Male / Female?	Male 148	Female 52	In your opinion, your pol. Representative would be Male / Female?	Male 78	Female 22
Do you like to see a new face as your leader?	164	36	Do you like to see a new face as your leader?	76	24
Which type of political leader do you like?	Educated 200	Un-educated 00	Which type of political leader do you like?	Educated 99	Un-educated 01
	Honest 200	Dishonest 00		Honest 100	Dishonest 00
Are you a political worker?	64	136	Are you a political worker?	100	00
Have you attended any	92	108	Have you attended any electoral	100	00

electoral campaign/ pol. Rally?			campaign/ pol. Rally?		
Is there any educational qualification regarding the selection of people's representative?	36	164	Is there any educational qualification regarding the selection of people's representative?	16	84
In your opinion, is educational qualification required for electing the representatives?	188	12	In your opinion, is educational qualification required for electing the representatives?	100	00
In your opinion, your local representatives are impartial to provide benefits to the people irrespective of political colour?	132	68	In your opinion, your local representatives are impartial to provide benefits to the people irrespective of political colour?	98	02
During the last five years have you had any contact with a political representative of your locality?	116	84	During the last five years have you had any contact with common people of your locality?	94	06
Do you think that the elections conducted by the election commission are free and fair?	192	08	Do you think that the elections conducted by the election commission are free and fair?	100	00
In your opinion, what are the factors which influence you in the voting process?	Muscle & money power, election feasting, local favoritism, election camping, pre election promises, election meeting, vote bribing, door to door camping, factionalism, party loyalty, income & education of candidate, revolt of vote, candidate personality, grouping, local and current issues etc.		In your opinion, what are the factors which influence you in the voting process?	Muscle & money power, election feasting, local favoritism, election camping, pre election promises, election meeting, vote bribing, door to door camping, factionalism, party loyalty, income & education of candidate, revolt of vote, candidate personality, grouping, local and current issue etc.	

Table No. Sources: Personal and Direct Interview through Sample Questionnaire on Voting Behaviour of Rural Areas i.e. in Kushmandi Block.

7. Major Observations

As far as the survey is concerned, the data which were collected and analysed by me gave a lot of viable awareness about the voting behaviour of rural areas particularly in the block of Kushmandi in Dakshin Dinajpur. As far as the factors and mentality is concerned the mentality of the common people are more or less same in all over the country. But after compiling all those information I got the following observations regarding my study area.

- A. Most of the common people living in the focal area were not interested in politics because according to them it is only meant of those who are born to rule, but we are born to be ruled. But in other side, the behaviour of the political representatives is quite different as they viewed upon their interest in politics.
- B. The major portions did not show interest about their active participation in politics, they kept themselves passive, but the political representatives always drowned in the political culture.
- C. The right to vote is a crucial context in the modern era. But the people in my study area are mostly aware about their political right and they use those rights as per the need. The representative from that locality treats this right as their birth right.
- D. According to public opinion, irrespective caste, creed, religion, gender etc. everyone living in the study area has a great importance on voting and its

processes. The political representatives are no more different to this.

- E. Voting behaviour of the people has a great concern upon their representative whether they are male or female. Majority of the informers have their faith upon the male political representatives in their locality. As the male representatives becomes more efficient than the female representatives.
- F. Every citizen in the locality responded about their new leader because change is the sign of development. If we change our leader or give a chance to a new face then he will start with a fresh thinking.
- G. Majority of persons living in the particular area are in favour of selection of an educated and honest political representative. Therefore, we find a many times voters' elect their representatives with higher education and honest personalities.
- H. Sometimes we found that peoples joined in political rally and campaign without their willing but also somehow in pressure of their local political party or leader either he/she may be a worker or not. But in case of political representatives they are always find themselves within the political circle which becomes their profession.
- I. According to the constitution of India, there are no educational qualifications to become a people's representative. Therefore, it always affects the voting behaviour in both the cases like common people upto the leader. Peoples are commonly like to elect educated candidates by which the pace of

development and implementation of policy becomes higher in a transparent way. This idea also gets similar status with regard to the views presented by the political leaders.

- J. It's an amazing fact which I found in my study that the political representatives are working partially in the Kushmandi block by favouring beneficiaries belong to their own political colour as informed by the common people.
- K. In democratic countries like India political representatives behave like unknown persons because we do not have any right to withdraw power from them as they are elected for a fixed term of five years. This has been proved in case of Kushmandi also. Majority of people don't have easy access to their representatives and vice-versa. But representatives are always trying to prove themselves as they are always with the common people.
- L. According to Article 324(i) of the Indian constitution, the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls, conduct elections to the parliament and every state legislature and offices of President and Vice-President are rests upon the Election Commission of India. The 68 years of the working of the constitution has proved it's efficiency for conducting elections free and fair. The people of the locality also responded that everyone has confidence upon the working of the Election Commission of India.
- M. The major factors which are influencing the voting behaviour in the study area are as follows:
- N. Muscle and money power, Election Feasting, Local favouritism, Election Campaigning, Pre-election promises, Election meeting, Vote bribing, Door-to-door campaign, Factionalism, Party loyalty, Party identification, Party ideology, Charismatic figure, Income of the candidate, Education and educational status of the candidates, Revolt of vote, Candidates' personality, Grouping, Local issues, Current issues, Alcoholism, Language of the candidate, Age of the candidate, Sex and gender, Family influence, Party Flags and posters, Election boycott, Local Antagonism and others.
- O. As far as constitutional provisions for the betterment of the common people as well as backward communities is concerned the local people are more or less aware about those policies. But the welfare projects are still in the hands of the political leaders as they promote them like they are providing from their own party fund.

- P. Now a days modern politics only depends upon the populist politics by which the political representatives or political parties can easily won the votes. This happens in case of pre-poll campaigns as many of the political representatives we found campaigns on false promises.

Kushmandi community development block is an administrative division of Gangarampur sub-division of Dakshin Dinajpur district in West Bengal. As per 2011 census the total population is 1,98,752 belong to rural area where 1,04,589 nos. of people belong to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities i.e. more than the number of people belong to general category. The main profession of these people is agriculture and no industry has been established in this block since its inception. Most of the people are simple and do not know critical politics. They believe in traditional culture and values. They prefer their representatives from their locality and also from their community. For this reason they elected their M.L.A.s such as; Jitendra Mohan Roy for four times (1967-1972), Dharendra Nath Roy for two times (1977-1982) and Narmada Chandra Roy for seven times (1987-till date).

8. Concluding Observation

Finally, we may conclude with the observation that, there is the need of voting to present the political right of every citizen living inside the country after knowing the condition of Election System of that country. There are lot of problems of voters in Kushmandi Block of South Dinajpur District and these problems are still persists in the said area, but with the help of political parties and representatives and also with the awareness of the people in Kushmandi block of South Dinajpur district, the problems are now a days minimized. Because the voters are influenced with the personal qualities of the candidates of the study area. As a result we found that the particular candidates have been winning repeatedly from those assembly seats of Kushmandi since independence as discussed earlier. There are a lot of changes has been occurring in the election system through electoral system of voting e.g. the introduction of voters' Identity Cards, Electronic Voting Machines, VVPAT system and many more. But still people are waiting for the introduction of EVMs in the Panchyat elections and the system of E-Nominations and also if possible the introduction of E-voting by the election commission of India. However, the present election system is the best one in the world because world society became astonished to see about the role and functions of the election commission of India and independent and impartial commission conducting elections for the whole country taking into consideration of all types socio-political, regional, geographical and biological condition as a whole.

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