

A Critical Appraisal on Electoral Behaviour in India

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ABSTRACT

Being an integral part of electoral democracy voters play a vital role in making government. Representative democracy cannot sustain without electorates. Voters or electorates determine present and future of the ruling system of most of democratic countries in the world. But its behaviour is vary as per socio economic and political ecology of respective country. Existing political culture and socialisation process determine voting behaviour. Voters as an integral part of greater social domain are highly influenced by its belongingness to respective caste, community, religion and other factors. Their role in election reflects manner and behaviour in the context of social environment . India as the largest parliamentary democracy in the world represents plural and diverse structure of social domain. Voters here are more concerned with their affiliation to respective social and economic identity. In many times voters are hardly independent as autonomous entity in electing their representatives. Their political behaviour is highly influenced by external forces. It constitutes voting behaviour in India. The present study is a humble attempt to make an estimate on voting behaviour in India.

1. Introduction

Election is a part and parcel of democracy. Voters are the driving force of election. Democratic government system is visualised through active participants of voters. Democracy as the ruling system of people can be realised only through voters. Voters elect them who runs the government on behalf of people. That is why voters play a strong role in democratic system. A free and fair election depends upon them. But the voters' behaviour is not same to all countries in the world. They behave as per their individual and collective thinking and manner. In this context the topic of voting behaviour is becoming more and more popular and important. Researchers in the west have built up a considerable pool of data on electoral behaviour .They have been particularly diligent in trying to establish the potency of class, education ethnicity, religion as determinants of voting behaviour¹In democracy voter has a political identity .But at the same time, he or her is a part of greater society. Being a part of social system he or she is definitely influenced by other factors like socio economic, culture, caste, community, ethnicity, religion, language ,geography , region etc. Every voter feels belongingness to his or her socio economic , regional and cultural identity. So in the time of casting vote every voter mind such factors. In this discussion an attempt is made to analyse voting behaviour and its determinants along with its impact upon democracy. Of course, the proposed discussion is limited to Indian context only.

Objectives of the study

Main objectives of the study are

1. To examine political system of India in the light of voting behaviour.
2. To analyse determinants of Voting behaviour
3. To highlight the lacunas in Indian electoral system in the context of voting behaviour
4. To make an critical judgement of the aforesaid issues.

Method and Materials

The proposed study has been made with the help of historical and analytical method. Logic used here is both deductive and inductive. Most of data and information used for the same are from secondary sources like books, journal and electronic materials.

Justification of study

The proposed study is timely and relevant because it is hardly found to focus on the problematic issues relating voting behaviour in India. Moreover, most of discussions on it are dealt with conventional issues. At the present changing scenario voting behaviour is needed to highlight from a new perspective.

Scope of study

The voting behaviour is a global phenomena the present study is limited to voting behaviour in India only. Of course, a brief theoretical conception has been highlighted in the introductory part to follow the proposed discussion.

2. Discussion

In simple sense voting behaviour means the behaviour or psychological manner of voters in the time of casting vote in election. Though its meaning is too simple to understand but it is a very complex matter. Voting behaviour is the way that different people want to vote. It is studied so that political scientists, or more accurately political psychologists, can understand why certain people vote for different political parties and so that political parties can predict who might vote for them in the future, which helps them to plan the policies, communication and the people who might best represent them and convince voters to vote for them at the next election. It focuses on the determinants of why people vote as they do and how they arrive at the decisions for casting vote for some one. Sociologists try to look to the socio-economic determinants of

support for political parties. It observes the relations between class, occupation, ethnicity, sex, age and vote. Similarly, political scientists' discuss the influence of political factors like political issues, political programmes, electoral campaigns, and the popularity of party leaders on voting behaviour. Voting in elections is the direct way in which a whole population can affect government. So, voters decide to cast their votes on their own way so that his or her political right affect the ruling system positively and negatively. They are highly determined by their socio economic cultural and emotional background. Similarly in the days of modern science and technology and social media Indian voters especially new generation behave differently in the time of casting vote.

3. Theory or Model of Voting Behaviour

Theories of political behaviour, as an aspect of political science, attempt to quantify and explain the influences that define a person's political views, ideology, and levels of political participation. Broadly speaking, behaviour is political whenever individuals or groups try to influence or escape the influence of others. Political behaviour is the subset of human behaviour that involves politics and powers.²

The study of voting behaviour can be made under following theories and approaches:

Socio -Psychological Theory

Analysts belonging to this school try to explain voting behaviour on the basis of such social and psychological variables as religion, class, language, age, gender etc. S.M. Lipset is a pioneer in this field. According to him, patterns of voting participation are strikingly similar in various countries. He writes in the book 'political Man' 'Men vote more than women, the better educated than less educated, urban residents more than rural, those between 35 and 55 more than younger or older voters, married than unmarried, higher status persons, more than lower, members of organisations, more than non members.'³ Recently, some political scientists have been interested in many studies which aimed to analyze the relation between the behaviour of social groups and the political outcomes. Some of the social groups included in their studies have been age demographics, gender, and ethnic groups.⁴ Sociological Theory lays stress on studying voting behaviour in the light of sociological discourse. It examines how society does a vital matter in the behaviour of electorates or voters. Being an integral part of great social domain citizens are politically socialised and cultured within the respective social system. Indian voter enters into the process of political socialization through varied agencies and institutions. They perform their political duty as per how they are socialised politically. Sociological theory gives importance on the relationship between individual and social structure.

Ecological Theory

Ecological model relates voting influenced by geographical are ward, constituency, state, region, hill, plain etc. Maximum voters cast their vote by concerning locality, regional and geographical sentiment.

Rational choice Theory

Rational-choice approaches argue that voting is determined by individual's personal choice of self-interest. In such model a voter always justify his valuable vote from rational and logical perspective. He realizes that his vote is very valuable in making government. Anthony Downs has stated that political choice, like economic choice, is determined by the individual after a rational calculation of interests. To him, politics is a market place. He sees the behaviour of individual and organisation as rational and as the pursuit of self interest.⁵

4. Long term and Short time Influences of Voting Behaviour.

The study of voting behaviour can be roughly divided into long-term and short-term influences. Long-term influences include social class, gender, race, culture, religion, age, education Short-term influence include the performance of the governing party, major issues, the electoral campaign, the image of party leaders, the influence of the mass media and major political events.

5. Determinants of voting behaviour in India

Indian' electoral behaviour is a complex discourse. The behaviour of an Indian voter is influenced by several determinants like caste, religion, community, language, ideology, party identification, anti established feeling⁶ Many thinkers and scholars like M.N. Shrinivas, Ghanasyam Shah, Rajni Kothari have made extensive study and survey on electoral behaviour in India. On the basis of an empirical study they found certain special determinants of Voting behaviour in India as follows ----

Caste

Caste is a strong element of voting behaviour in India. It has deep roots in the Indian society. Caste occupies distinct position in making the voting behaviour in India. The political parties in India make their policies and election strategies always keeping in mind the caste factor. Even the candidates are selected keeping the caste factor in mind. Election campaigns are made in such a way that it makes the voters to feel their respective caste identities. For instance, the slogans like Jat Ka Vot Jat Ko etc. are made to satisfy the voters on to vote for the candidates belonging to their caste. In Bihar, UP, MP, Gujrat are major examples of caste politics. In such state, Brahmin, Thakur, Yadav, Dalit are main concerns for Voter. Similarly in South India, Reddy, Nayar are major factors and on the other hand, in Assam and other north eastern states Tribal non Tribal are main concern of voters.

Religion and Language

Like caste religion is another strong determinant of voting behaviour in India. Hindu, Islam, Christianity, Buddhist, Sikh are dominant factors in Indian politics. Parties prepare the list of candidates on the basis of religious line. The existence of parties like AIUDF, Hindu Mahasabha, Akali Dal, Shiv Sena etc is examples of religious determinant. They have made religion as a determinant of voting behaviour. Similarly language also determines voting behaviour. Hindi speaking leaders can motivate concerned voters of North India. Bengali speaking

voters are motivated by concerned leaders in Silchar, Karimganj etc.

Ideology of the political parties

The ideology and political agenda of political parties are kept in mind by the voters. People want to vote to political parties which promise to solve their issues and have agenda which falls in line with their own expectations and ideology. Voters are influenced by party ideology. Due to ideological weakness and crush People kept Indian National congress in power for a long period. Labour and working class feel deep crush for Communist party.

Personality of the Candidates

Attractive personality of candidate highly motivates voters. Personality of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Atal Bihari Vajpayee determined the behaviour of Indian voters. At present charismatic leadership of Narendra Modi helps in growing popularity of BJP. AB KI BAR MODI KAR SARKAR, HAR HAR MODI are example of popularity of Narendra Modi who is called the poster boy of BJP. It is a well known that many independent candidates also win the elections by defeating candidates belonging to the major parties by their ability to gather people's support by attractive personality.

Age and gender of the candidates

The voters decide to vote for comparatively mature candidates rather than very old and young candidates. The very old candidates are considered to be weak and inefficient and the young candidates are perceived to be immature. Voters also want to vote for men than women candidates. Many still hold the view that politics are not suitable for women.

Sub-Nationalism and Regionalism

Sub-nationalism and regionalism are crucial factor in influencing the voting behaviour of the people. In recent years Indian voters have been found to be interested in their regional sentiments. Regional movements and sub nationalism grown up in North east, Kashmir, south India etc are re major driving force in this context. At times some ethnic and secessionist groups use pressure tactics to forces the voters to vote in a particular way. Some regional political parties like AGP, TDP, National conference of Kashmir, Naga Nationalist Organization, Gorkha League, Jharkha party have used this method and determine the voting behaviour of the concerned people.

Money and Muscle power

There is a famous saying that Indian politics determined by three Ms ---Money, Muscle and Mafia. Democratic ideology has been dangerously affected by money power for buying voters and controlling government. When money is not effective then voters are threatened and terrorised by muscle power and the structure which controls the politics is mafia. Due to being poor and weak voters are controlled by such undemocratic means and method. In Assam, many surrendered ULFA, Criminals are in the power structure with the help of money and muscle power. Most of political leaders in India are accused of various criminal offences and many of them came back from jail. Voters are sometimes lured by

political parties by offering cash for vote and providing services like digging wells, constructing tanks, political parties by offering cash for vote and providing services like digging wells, constructing tanks, roads, libraries etc. In Assam maximum cultural function like Bihu Sanmilen, Rakh, Bhaona ceremonies are patronised by such rich leaders who extend financial assistance to concerned committees to gain their political support and loyalty.

Economic Factors

The economic status of the voters is an important indicator of voting behaviour. Though it is often considered as non-existent impact on voting, economic factors play an important role in shaping voting behaviour of the electorate. Poor people, unemployed youth, labouring and peasant class are highly motivated by affluent leaders. Such section of voters cast their valuable vote hoping a better economic condition after the election.

Effect of Illiteracy

Illiteracy and ignorance is a major factor of voting behaviour. Due to being not conscious of political right illiterate voters fail elect eligible candidate. They are misled by selfish and clever leaders for their political benefit. Illiteracy affects the rate of voting also. Maximum voters are not interested in casting vote and those who are interested do not know to cast vote properly. In recent Panchayat election held in Assam 33 percent votes were cancelled due to ignorance of voters. In rural and tribal areas and among the illiterate people, traditionalism exercises a firm hold on the people and their beliefs. As a result many voters do not individually take the voting decisions. They take voting decision after having discussions in the family, village and group. Many of them are influenced by head of family, village, community and priests of temple, mosque etc.⁷

Public Opinion

Since the earliest inception public opinion has been a strong determinant of voting behaviour. It is a short time influential factor of voting behaviour. Some time voters respond public opinion regarding certain burning issues like Foreign national movement in 1983 in Assam, settlement of Hindu Bangladeshi, issue of constructing Ram Mandir, Garibi Hotau, Indira Hotau India Bochau are famous examples of Public opinion that motivated voters in many election. Public opinion may be the collective expression of voters against and in favour of party or candidates.

Mass Media: Print, electronic and social media.

Mass media whether it is print, electronic and social are very strong motivators for voters. Media can change the electoral politics over night. Today, due to emergence of private and social media voting behaviour has got a new direction. Most of TV channels, papers are owned by media house and political leaders. It campaign for its owners during and before election through continuous motivational programmes. Moreover, now a day's social media like Facebook, Twitter, are driving motivators for voters.

6. Critical conclusion

Most of determinants mentioned above are not positive and desirable for democracy. Due to being the democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people must be formed through free and fair election. But can you say the aforesaid factors are signs of free election? Is election conducted through such voters is free and fair? Democracy sustains and lasts long on rationality and scientific temperament of literate and conscious voters. They should not be motivated by their other identities and existence. They should be aware of being a dutiful and responsible citizens

.Their votes neither can be stolen nor can be bargained. Such realization will create a new light in the street of nation. Democracy will survive through logical voters not cunning leaders. Of course, due to increase of literacy rate and educated people voting behaviour is little seen to be determined by certain narrow and dogmatic factors. Basically, social and political environment is more positive than days in the decade just after independence, however, darkness is still not removed completely .Until and unless people are politically conscious problem will remain unsolved and selfish class will be benefitted in every election.

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