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POLITICS AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF ELECTIONS IN INDIA

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Abstract

Voting is one of the most commonly used terms in democratic politics. Voting is the life and soul of democracy because it is through elections the people elect their representatives, forms their government. Citizen uses voting as a means for communicating his endorsement or objection to governmental decisions, policies and programmes of various political parties. Voting behaviour refers to actions and inactions of citizens in respect of participating in the elections that take place for members of their local, regional, or national government. The study of determinants of electoral behaviour constitutes a very significant area of empirical study. An empirical study of the determinants which inspire and influence the voters to exercise his right to vote in favour or against a particular candidate is influenced by different factors such as gender, race and pressure groups in invoking religious and communal factors, the influence of money or charismatic personality of a leader. The main purpose of the present study is to focus interest on voting behaviour in India and to emphasize the factors that determine the voting behaviour in India.

Key Words: Voting, Determinants, Voting Behaviour, Election, and Constituency.

Introduction

“Casting a vote is one of the most utilized terms in the modern age of democratic politics. In democratic systems, adult citizen uses “voting” as a means for expressing his approval or disapproval of governmental decisions, policies, and programmes. Casting a Voting is an important process of the democratic system, and the decision made at the base has the power to change the power elites. For this motive, voting may maybe be looked upon as the basic decision-making process in a democracy. However, in broad terms, as Richaed Rose and Harve Massavir point out, voting covers as many as six important functions:-

1. It involves an individual’s choice of governors or major governmental policies;
2. It permits individuals to contribute to a reciprocal and continuing exchange of

influence with officeholders and candidates;

3. It contributes to the development of an individual’s allegiance to the existing constitutional regime;
4. It contributes to the development of a voter’s disaffection from the existing constitutional regime;
5. It has emotional significance for individuals; and
6. For some individuals, it may be functionless of any emotional or political significant personal consequences. The study of voting behaviour has come to be regarded as an important feature of current political research and theory.

Objective of study

1. To understand the meaning of voting behaviour.
2. To analysis the determinants of voting behaviour in India.

Research methodology

This paper is descriptive and analytical in nature. The data used in it have collected from secondary sources. Necessary secondary data is collected from journals, Reference Books.

What Is Voting Behaviour

Samuel S. Eldersveld in his article "Theory and Method of Investigating Electoral Behaviour" writes: "The term electoral behaviour is not new. But recently, it has been used to describe certain areas of research and types of political phenomena that were not previously conceived or considered inappropriate." Behaviour during voting is not limited to the assessment of voting statistics, records, and counting of changes in elections and balances. It is an analysis of a person's psychological processes and his relationship to political actions. According to J. K. Plano and Riggs: "Behaviour in voting is a field of study regarding how people tend to vote in public elections and the reasons why they vote the way they do". A person's choice of casting vote and related values is called voting activity. Elections relate to the process of democratic participation in which all people express their opinions about individuals and issues by making voting ballots. However, given the situation with Indian selective behaviour, prof. V.M.Sirsikar well notes: "The study of the election process points to other factors besides rationality. It can be said that India has achieved a stable government, but massive manipulations, caste influences, fears of minorities and the prime minister's charismatic dominance did not play a significant role in this process.

Voting Behaviour in India

India is the largest democracy in the world. All citizens of 18 years or above of the age have the right to vote in Indian elections. Despite the fact that nearly half of them are illiterates, they have in the past acted wisely and in a mature way to elect their representatives. They have already participated in several elections to Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies and a large number

of bi-elections. At the first general elections in India in 1952, some election studies were conducted. In the beginning, these studies lack methodological rigour and sophistication. However, with the increased use of the survey method and observation technique has improved the quality of election studies in India. Indian electoral studies are mainly inspired by Western research on voting behaviour, particularly in the United States, Colombia, and Michigan. Scholars at Columbia University in New York highlighted the impact of social and environmental forces on voter choice.

Voting Behaviour in India and its Determinants:

In India following main political and socio-economic factors which act as determinates of voting behaviours in our Democratic system:

1. Education

It is often seen that the educated people take more interest in casting their vote as compared to the illiterates because they know the importance of their right to vote and consider the use of this right a national duty. They know that they can elect the government of their choice by executing their right to vote. Thus, education affects the voting behaviour of person and with the spread of education the ratio of the use of franchise is also increasing and during the election of the 16th lok sabha, the percentage of voting had gone up to 66.38% which was quite high in comparison to previous elections.

2. Charisma

One important factor of voting behaviour is Charisma. It means the exceptional quality of a factor and overrides group elements leader that becomes a source of attraction and reverence for the people in large numbers in an opposite sense, It also means a source of fear to many people because they do not speak or dare to speak against the wishes of a powerful leader. Fortunately, in our country, the constructive aspect of charisma has had its role at the time

of the election. The enormous participation in the meetings faced by imposing personalities such as Nehru, Indira, Vajpayee, Modi and a sudden change in the minds of the voters in response to the appeals launched by such great figures can be considered concrete proofs of the role of the charisma in the electoral behaviour of our people. The slogan of "Garibi Hatao" performed miracles in the 1971 elections, the personality of Mrs Gandhi after India's miraculous victory in the Bangladesh war had the same wonderful impact on the mind of the electorate in the State Assembly elections of 1972. The image of Jayaprakash Narayan had the same effect in the elections of 1977. The personality of Modi, BJP won the election of 2014.

3. Caste

Caste continues to be a determining factor in voting behaviour in India. It has deep roots in society and constitutes an important basis for social relations at all levels. Despite the adoption of various provisions that prohibit action and discrimination on the basis, the caste continues to be a determining factor in political behaviour. The politicization of caste and casteism in politics has been a well-known reality of the Indian political system. The political parties in India, without exception, in formulating their policies, programs and electoral strategies always keep the caste factor in mind. It is often seen that several political parties while nominating the candidate and the voter while exercising their right to vote, pay particular attention to the candidate's caste at the time of the election slogan as "jat ki beti jat ko, jat ki voto jat ko" are raised. The role of caste as a determinant of voting behaviour has been examined by many scholars and they have come out with the result, as Morris Jones writes, "Politics is more important for caste and caste is more important for politics than before". Rural voters pay special attention to the caste of the candidate. Despite the adoption of democratic values that conceive a society free from casteism, the caste continues to characterize politics in India.

4. Ideological commitment

The ideological commitment of the voters also effect the voting behaviour most of the voters are crazy about particular ideology and they keep in view the ideology of the candidate and the political party at the time of casting their votes. This fact is applicable to the voters who are the supporter of the leftist parties.

5. Populist slogans

Sometimes different political parties raise the populist slogans according to the need of the time and affect the thinking of the voters. For example, congress raised the slogan of, 'garibi hatao' in 1971. During the 16th Lok sabha election the slogans like 'Aabki bar Modi sarkar.

6. Personal contacts

Personal contacts of the candidate and voters also affect the voting behaviour of the voters. Most of the voters get influenced by personal visits of the candidate and they cast their vote in their favour. Besides this, the relatives and friends of the candidate also cast their votes in favour of them because of their personal relationship.

7. Party loyalty

In India, many of the people are attached to their different political party and they always cast their vote in favour of the party rather than the candidate. We can't change their party loyalty even when they know that their candidate would not be going to win, such voters are known as committed voters.

8. Religion

Religion also plays an important role in Indian politics. Many political parties have been formed on the basis of religion in India. At the time of elections, different political parties beg votes in the name of religion. They raise the slogan 'Religion is in danger' and instigate the religious feelings of the people. While distributing party tickets the religion of the voters and candidates is given due consideration. It is often seen that the voters

cast their votes in favour of the candidates of their own religion on being influenced by the religious feeling.

9. Language

India is a multi-lingual state. The language also serves as a factor in voting behaviour. The organization of states on a linguistic basis fully reflects the importance of language as a factor of politics in India. There have been problems in states like that of the status of one particular language in that state, or relating to the quality of the status of a language of a state. Since people have an emotional attachment with their languages, they easily get influenced whenever there comes up any issue relating to language. Linguistic interests always influence voting behaviour, for example, D.M.K secured the vote of the people in Tamil Nadu in 1967 and 1971 by making anti-Hindi propaganda.

10. Influence of money

India is a poor country with a large number of people living below the poverty line. Money as such plays a crucial role in determining the behaviour of votes in India. A rich candidate or party has more chances of winning the elections always. At the time of elections, the poor are allured by the glitter of the money and their votes are purchased. In this way, the process of, 'give a note and take vote' goes on in India.

11. Performance of the Party in Power:

Each Political party contests elections on the basis of an election manifesto, and after coming to power, it is expected to fulfil the promises made therein. Good or bad performance of the ruling party, just on the basis of the election promises made and promises actually fulfilled influence the basic behaviour of the people in a big way. We experienced it in 1989 in India, when the Congress (I), which got a thumping majority in 1984 elections, could not win even a simple majority in the very next election held in 1989 mainly because of its failure to perform

successfully. In 1989, the Congress Party and in 1991 the Janata Dal failed to win because of their failures to exercise power and maintain their political stabilities. The main reason for this is a corresponding increase in the number of "floating voter" or "switchers" who are mostly young citizens from an educated upper middle class and are ready to transfer their support from one to another party on the basis of their performance.

12. Mass literacy

Mass literacy has been another determinant of voting behaviours in India. Due to this weakness of the people that political parties, communal groups, and militant outfits, are in a position to exploit the sentiments of the people in the name of caste, religion, region and another such factor. The votes of the illiterate constitute a big proportion of the votes polled and hence it plays a big role in determining the outcomes of elections. However, despite this fact, the common sense and maturity born out of the past experience have also been playing a big role in influence the voters mind and actions. In 1977 they united to defeat the forces authoritarianism and 1980; they again to defeat this united nonperformers.

13. Factionalism

The Indian Political life from the village level to the national level is characterized by factionalism. Neither political party nor even the cadre-based BJP and the two communist parties is free from factionalism. It is at work, as Rajni Kothari points out, at all level of the congress. It has adversely affected the strength of the congress is a political party with a glorious past, a weak present and not a bright future. Other parties are also suffering from factionalism. The voters are getting disappointed with some of the political parties because of their inability to overcome factionalism. They are moving to regional parties which, because of their small organizational network and limited operational

based are relatively less affected by factionalism.

14. Public Esteem of the Candidate

A candidate report with the people with a constituency or his known qualities or contribution in any value spread of activity always acts as a factor of voting behaviour. In addition to his party loyalty or opinion on various issues and problems, the voter, while making his choice, always takes into account the nature and level of his association with the candidate. A positive image of a party's candidate is a source of popular support for the party. A voter prefers to vote for a candidate who is approachable and who can help him anyway.

15. Election campaign

Each party launches election campaigns on a large scale to influence the voters in its favour. Use of mass gatherings, street gatherings, personal contacts, posters, poster war, movie star speeches, TV and radio broadcasts, newspaper advertising, pamphlets, processions, and propaganda is made to win votes, particularly floating votes. Polling campaign plays a role in influencing the choice of the voters. The ruling party always try to create an impression through its election campaign that it has a chance to win can earn some additional votes as several voters try to stand beside what they perceive to be a winning side.

Conclusion

These are thus the important determinants of voting behaviour in India. The continuity in the operation of India's political system as a developing democratic political system is progressively training the Indian voters. The process of emergence of an issue-based political struggle in place of caste or religion or personality dominated struggle for power is very slowly but gradually changing. Elections occupy a prominent place in the democratic government. It is a way through which people express and implement their political opinion

and control the political organization of society. However, the behaviour of a voter is affected by many factors such as religion, caste, community, language, money, policy or ideology, the objective of the polls, and the like political parties make use of these variables for winning the elections. It is, therefore, crucial that the use of these determinants should be avoided and elections should be conducted in a very free and fair manner.

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