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THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Independent and just elections are part and parcel of a democratic system without which the other political institutions such as the legislative forums, the political parties and even the government are not legitimate. As a democracy gives the power of enacting legislation to the representative of the people, the importance of elections cannot be underestimated. Electoral systems translate votes cast into election results. But this rather bland description obscures the important political effects that electoral systems can have. For one thing, different electoral systems may convert the same pattern of voting into quite different electoral outcomes. In addition, different electoral systems may result in similar patterns of preferences among the electorate being expressed in quite different voting patterns. This can happen because under some systems voters have no reason not to vote 'sincerely' (that is, in accordance with their true preferences), whereas under other systems they may have an incentive to vote 'tactically'. The study of determinants of electoral behaviour constitutes a very significant area of empirical investigation. Man is a rational creature in the philosophical sense of term; he is not so rational in the realms of his economic or political behaviour. An empirical study of the determinants of electoral behaviour displays the astounding fact that the behaviour of man is influenced by several irrational factors and pressure groups in invoking religious and communal factors, influence of money or charismatic personality of a leader and host of other irrational forces have their definite influence on the minds of the voters. The main purpose of the present study is to focus attention on voting behaviour in India and to highlight the factors that determine the voting behaviour in India.

Introduction

Elections are the pride of democracy and franchise is the most notable medium to participate in the political system through elections. A study of electoral behaviour therefore helps in the understanding of the democratic system. "Voting" is one of the most commonly used terms in contemporary age of democratic politics. The ever increasing popularity of democratic theory and practice has even made this term a household name. In democratic systems, and their number is quite large and even increasing, each adult citizen uses „voting“ as a means for expressing his approval or disapproval of governmental decisions, policies and programmes of various political parties and the qualities of the candidates who are engaged in the struggle to get the status of being the representatives of the people. In a limited way voting refers to the function of electing representatives by casting votes

in elections. The study of voting behaviour has come to be regarded as an important aspect of contemporary political research and theory.

Electoral machinery

The Indian Constitution makers were eager to have an independent machinery to run the new electoral system in an infant democratic order. They began with the introduction of universal adult franchise unknown earlier to India. The Constitution through Article 326 grants electoral franchise to every Indian citizen who has attained 18 years of age and who has not been declared a bankrupt, criminal, insane or a non-resident. Articles 324 to 329 of the Indian Constitution describe the electoral machinery.

Election Commission:

The Election Commission is composed of a Chief Election Commissioner, and such numbers of Election Commissioners, if any, who are to be appointed by the President of India on the advice of the Prime Minister. The President may fix the number from time to time. When other election commissioners are appointed the Chief Election Commissioner will act as the Chairman. It is a centralized independent body. Their tenure and the service conditions are laid down by Parliament and cannot be changed during their term of office. So far no regional commissioners have been appointed, the only exception being the first General Election in 1952. An election branch however exists in each State headed by the Chief Electoral Officer appointed by the Election Commissioner in consultation with the state government.

The major responsibility of the Election Commission is to recognize the political parties and to allot the election symbols. The Commission functions as a court of law in this respect. The Chief Election Commissioner has wide powers in matters of appointment of the Election Commissioners, Deputy Election Commissioners, Regional Commissioners and Chief Electoral Officers.

According to the EC 1,910 million people were eligible to vote, with an increase of 84.3 million voters since the last election in 2014, making it the largest ever election in the world. 15 million voters aged 18-19 years became eligible to vote for the first time. 468 million eligible voters, 432 million were female and 38,325 identified themselves belonging to third gender. To the 71,735 overseas voters also enrolled. The residents of the former enclaves exchanged under the 2015 India-Bangladesh boundary agreement voted for the first time.

Voting Behaviour:

The voting Behaviour has recently been expanded in the meaning and is taken as one major and broad area of study. The study of electoral behaviour constitutes a very significant area of empirical investigation. Man is a rational creature in the philosophical sense of the term; he is not so rational in the realms of his economic or political behaviour. An empirical study of the electoral behaviour displays the astounding fact that the behaviour of man is influenced by several irrational factors and pressure groups in invoking religious and communal factors, influence of money or charismatic personality of a leader and a host of other irrational forces can have their definite influence on the minds of the voters.

What Is Voting Behaviour

Samuel S. Eldersveld in his article „Theory and Method in Voting Behaviour Research“ writes: “The term „voting behaviour“ is not new. But it has been used of late to describe certain areas of study and types of political phenomena which previously had either not been conceived or were considered irrelevant.” 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 (perception, emotion, and motivation) and their relation to political action as well as of institutional patterns, such as the communication process and their impact on election.

Voting Behaviour in India

India is the largest working democracy, a parliamentary democracy, in the world. At the time of March, April 1996 polls, an electorate of as many as 591.5 million voters went to the polls to choose their representatives from amongst 14474 contestants. All men and women 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 mature way to elect their representatives. They have already participated in seventeen elections to Lok Sabha, several elections to state legislative assemblies and a large number of bi- elections.

The 2019 Indian general election 17th was held in seven phases from 11th April to 19 May, 2019 to constitute the 17th Loksabha. The voters were counted and results was declared on 23rd May about 900 million people were eligible to vote and turnout was over 67 percent the highest ever as well as the highest participation by women voters.

With the first general elections held in India in 1952 was some election studies conducted. In the beginning these studies lack methodological rigor and sophistication. But as more and more studies of election politics and voting behaviour were made the research tools used by psychologists became increasingly sharpened. At the outset most of these studies were impressionistic and journalistic in orientation. However, with the increased use of survey method and observation technique has the quality of election studies in India improved. Election studies in India were mainly inspired by western studies on voting behaviour, especially the Columbia and Michigan studies in the United States.

Determinants of voting Behaviour

The study of determinants of electoral behaviour constitutes a very significant area of empirical investigation. Man is a rational creature in the philosophical sense of term; he is not so rational in the realms of his economic or political behaviour. An empirical study of the determinants of electoral behaviour displays the astounding fact that the behaviour of man is influenced by several irrational factors and pressure groups in invoking religious and communal factors, influence of money or charismatic personality of a leader and host of other irrational forces have their definite influence on the minds of the voters. The main purpose of the present study is to focus attention on voting behaviour in India and to highlight the factors that determine the voting behaviour in India.

Determinants The behaviour of voter is influenced by several factors such as religion, caste, community, language, money, policy or ideology, purpose of the polls, extent of franchise, political wave etc. The political parties and groups make use of these variables for the sake of winning the battle of the ballot box. Despite making their professions for enlightened secularism, politicians can be found making appeals to the religious and communal sentiments of the people; they can also be found involved in exploiting the factors of language or money to achieve the purpose of emerging successful in the war of votes. Appeals are issued and canvassing campaigns conducted in the name of a particular policy or ideology for the same purpose. The interest of the voters and accordingly their behaviour at the time of voting is also influenced by the nature or purpose of the elections or the extent of the suffrage.

What are the main determinants of voting behaviour in India?

In the democratic set up voting is essential process. The democratic system has been working smoothly, for the past 60 (57) years. Citizens of India enjoy their full freedom and understanding in voting power. Parties try to capture maximum number of votes to come in power. For this they tend to develop and determine the voting behaviour of the voters. Issues related to the daily life such as

unemployment, price rise, law & order system and other developmental issues are often influence the vote of common people.

Class

To a lesser degree than caste but equally influential at least in parts, is the class-consciousness. The class is an economic institution which reflects the income level of a voter. Class-based organized associations and institutions influence voting in the urban areas. Political parties take advantage of this consciousness. In cities like Bombay, Kanpur and Ahmedabad, the electoral behaviour of the industrial labour is a pointer to the class unification.

Socio-Economic Factors

The socio-economic determinants of voting are equally important: Age, education, income, sex, religion, ownership of land, past financial status, future expectancy or lack of it also determine voting. The older people, for instance, are more conservative in voting while the young are more radical. The majority of educated do not attach sufficient importance to the head of the family in giving their vote. Intellectual elite is also more inclined towards the opposition. The propertied do not support the revolutionary and the big-leap-forward parties, but support the establishment.

In India the role of money and liquor cannot be overlooked while discussing the voting behaviour. Although constitutionally speaking, limitations have been imposed on poll finance, yet votes are freely exchanged for notes. It is no secret that in rural areas voters are given free drinks to influence their preferences. The mass media also casts it's wide ranging influence but its reach is limited.

Political Parties

The most important institution affecting voting is the political parties and its leaders. In our country the candidates are important in their individual capacity and the personal merits of the candidates, specially his straight forwardness, experience and service, are given considerable importance by the voter but party organization is more important than the candidate. The organizational capacity, resources and collective thinking of a party out-do those of any candidate. Thus in each election, the party fortunes keep on changing. Although very few Indians are associated with parties these continue to be important because leaders are associated with them. In India, votes are claimed in the name of Gandhiji, Pandit Nehru, Jayaprakash, Lohia and Mrs. Gandhi and these leaders have become the symbol of stability democracy and progress. Thus the voters keep on changing their preference about parties through associating them with a leader. In 1967, 1972, 1977 and 1980 elections different parties were in power at the national and State levels and at some stages it was felt that the voter had changed his basic loyalty. Parties are also responsible for this change. They enter into the electoral arena on the eve of elections and thereafter their working is almost non-existent.

Voting - Negative Attitude

The very first question about voting is negative. Thousands of Indians do not simply exercise their vote. What could be the reason? Why is their attitude negative about voting? One answer to this question would be that while they have the right to vote, they neither believe in the electoral system nor do they confide in the political system under which voting is conducted. They, therefore, just do not vote. It is generally considered that such negative attitude towards voting is peculiar to the city-based middle-class voter. It has been founded that more voters in rural areas do not vote. The lake of political information and consciousness, the long distances between the polling booths typical of the rural areas are responsible for this attitude.

Social Factors

Family: Each individual lives in a small world of his own in which he is associated with his family, locality, sect, caste (jati) and other related associations and organizations to which he is usually obedient. The family, for instance, gives him his identity and mostly the voting decision is taken after consulting the family and remains subordinate to the consensus arrived in the household. Although individual decision in matters of voting is increasingly gaining importance, the mature opinion of the family elders still prevails.

Caste

The role of caste in Indian elections has been emphasized by several commentators. Caste is an important social institution of our country which gives the citizens a sense of belonging. Although caste has been responsible for creating tensions in the society, sociologists like M.N. Srinivas tell us that we wholesomely and silently accept caste to make it a unit of social action. Politics is a competitive enterprise and the aim is to capture power. It tries to manipulate the existing social institutions where the mass of the people are found. Caste is one such organization and political parties use caste to win votes.

Obviously, such an important factor as caste determines the electoral behaviour. Some commentators led by Rajni Kothari remind us that while a social institution such as caste has political dimensions, politics also has certain social dimensions, and politics also intrudes on caste solidarity and influences its rock-line formation. This point has been debated and is debatable but what is important is that while caste may not be central to electoral behaviour, its capacity to influence voting, nevertheless, cannot be denied.

Charisma

One important factor of voting behaviour is Charisma. It means exceptional quality of a factor and override 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 awe and terror that frightens the people in large numbers not to speak or dare to do anything against the wishes of the mighty leader. Fortunately, in our country, the constructive aspect of charisma has had its role at the time of election. Huge attendance at the meetings addressed by towering personalities like Nehru, Indira, Vajpayee, Modi and a sudden change in the mind of the voters in response to the appeals issued by such great figures may be counted as the concrete evidences of the role of charisma in the electoral behaviour of our people. The slogan of „Garibi Hatao“ worked miracles in the election of 1971; the personality of Mrs. Gandhi after India's miraculous victory in the Bangladesh War had the same marvelous 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. So was the effect of the personality of Rajiv Gandhi in the elections of 1984 and of V.P. Singh in the elections of 1989. Personality of Modi, BJP won election of 2014. That is why, it is said: "Where the groups factors are weak or cancel out, this charisma may be the major."

Campaign

Political parties organize the campaign and communicate the issues involved through discussions and propaganda. The imparting of information leads to a higher political consciousness which influence voting. And the differential effect of several specific emotions have been studied on voting behavior like surprise, Anger, Anxiety, Fear and Pride etc.,

Conclusion

However the behaviour of a voter is influence by several factors such as religion, caste, community, language, money, policy or ideology, purpose of the polls, extent of franchise and the like

political parties and groups make use of these variables for the sake of winning the battle of the ballot box. It is therefore, imperative that the use of these determinants should be avoided and elections should be conducted in a very free and fair manner. The continuity in the operation of India's political system as a developing democratic political system is gradually training the Indian voters. However perfect the electoral machinery is, its efficiency would depend on the cooperation extended by the political parties and the ruling party.

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