

CBCS B.A. POLITICAL SCIENCE HONS
SEM II CC4 : POLITICAL PROCESS IN INDIA

TOPIC II: Determinants of Voting Behaviour-Caste, Class, Gender & Religion

Synopsis: Voting is one of the most commonly used terms in contemporary age of democratic politics. The ever-increasing popularity of democratic theory and practices has even made this term a common household name.

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 large number 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 lacking methodologies and sophistication. However, now survey method and observation technique has improved much in quality of election studies in India. Such electoral studies are mainly inspired by Western research on voting behaviour.

Key notes:

- In democratic systems each adult citizen uses 'voting' as a means for expressing their approval or disapproval of governmental decisions, policies and programmes of various political parties and the qualities of the candidates who are engaged as the representatives of the people.
- 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; but they are not so rational in the areas of economic or political behaviour.
- An empirical study of the determinants of electoral behaviour displays the critical facts about the behaviour of man those are: **i) Cast, ii) Class, iii) Gender and iv) Religions** having definite influence on the minds of the Indian voters.

A) Introduction

"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. However, in broad terms, as Richard Rose and Harve Massavir point out, voting covers as many as six important functions:-

1. It involves individual's choice of governors or major governmental policies;
2. It permits individuals to participate in a reciprocal and continuing exchange of influence with officeholders and candidates;
3. It contributes to the development or maintenance of an individual's allegiance to the existing constitutional regime;
4. It contributes to the development or maintenance of a voter's disaffection from existing constitutional regime;
5. It has emotional significance for individuals; and
6. For some individuals it may be functionless i.e devoid of any emotional or political significant personal consequences.

B) 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.

In the words of Plano and Riggs, "Voting Behaviours 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."

It involves a study of human political behaviour in the context of voting in elections. Voting behaviours studies open windows on the minds of the millions of people who are involved in the political process as voters.

Election express democratic class struggle through voting. Major differences in the political allegiances of different age groups, classes, education, religious or ethnic groups have been reported by voting survey. The study of electoral behavior constitutes a very significant area of empirical investigation that takes the subjects of politics very close to the discipline of sociology with the result that a new dimension of advanced study, rather a discipline, is becoming more and more popular with the name of political sociology or sociological politics.

Man is a rational creature in the philosophical sense of term; he is not so rational in the realms of his economic and political behaviour. Man is influenced by several

irrational forces. The role of political parties and pressure groups in invoking religious and communal factors to influence the minds of the voters.

This fact applies to every democratic system and, as such, India is no exception. Keeping the case of Indian voting behavior in view, Prof.V.M.Sirsikar well observes: "An enquiry into the process of election indicates factors other than rationality. It may be said that India has secured a stable government, but the mass manipulation, casteist influences, minority fears, and charismatic hold of the Prime Minister have played no main part in this process."

C) Voting Behaviour In India: Determinants

The behaviour of voter is influenced by several factors such as i) Cast, ii) Class, iii) Gender and iv) Religions having definite influence on the minds of the Indian voters.

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. The voters are influenced by relevant slogans of Political parties associated to above stated factors. The role of all these factors can be examined in the study of Indian electoral behaviour.

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

Caste : Caste continues to be a determinant of voting behaviours in India. It has deep roots in the society and constitutes an important basis of social relations at all levels. Despite the adoption of several provisions which prohibit action and discrimination on its basis, caste continues to be a determinant of political behaviours. Politicisation of caste and casteism in polities has been a well known reality of the Indian political system. Caste is the main language of voters belonging to rural India.

The political parties in India, without any exception, while formulating their policies, programmes and election strategies always keep in mind the caste factor. Caste is a factor in the selection of candidates for contesting an election from a constituency. Votes are demanded in the name of caste and are commonly used "principles" for planning an election startagy.

The role of caste as a determinant of voting behaviour has been analysed by several scholars and they have come out with the conclusion, as Morris Jones writes, "Politics is more important to caste and caste is more important to politics than before." Example: The decision to implement Mandal Commission recommendation for reservation of jobs for other Backward Classes (castes) and the reaction it generated in politics testifies to the continued presence of caste as a determinant of politics in India.

However, at least in the urban areas caste as determinant of the voting behaviour has been undergoing a change. But the situation continues to be paradoxical.

Class: Class voting refers to the tendency for people in a particular social class to vote for a given political party or candidate rather than an alternative option, when compared with voters in other classes. In the wake of the financial crisis of 2007–2008, the emergence of radical right parties in many European societies and, most recently, in the shock results of Brexit in Britain and Trump in the USA, all of which have seen class divisions expressed in the polling booth, class is once again central to understanding politics.

The definition of social class has been disputed, as have the most appropriate ways to measure class positions and attempts to estimate statistically the magnitude of class–vote linkages. There is an empirical question of whether or not levels of class voting are stable, weakening or simply evolving, as Western societies have moved from being industrial to post-industrial. The key attributes of class position approaches to understanding political preference formation. Characterizations of class position have included numerous occupational classifications, employment status (e.g. owner versus employee), status rankings, income level, educational level, various combinations of education and income and occupation, and subjective class identification - typically, upper/middle/lower classes.

Many researchers studying voting behaviour have tended to adopt an established, validated and widely used measure of occupational class position originally developed as a measurement instrument by sociologists, particularly Goldthorpe (1987; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Goldthorpe and McKnight 2006). The main classes identified in this measure are the higher and lower professional and managerial classes (classes I and II), the 'routine nonmanual Social class and voting class' (typically lower-grade clerical 'white-collar workers', class III), the 'petty bourgeoisie' (small employers and self-employed, class IV), and the 'working class' (foremen and technicians, skilled, semi and unskilled manual workers, classes V, VI and VII). Typically, the working class is composed of semi and unskilled workers in manual or personal service occupations and agricultural workers (though not farmers, who are in class IV). Security is one of the basic differences between the working class and the middle class. That's why some voters react more strongly to changes in unemployment levels and others to rates of inflation. Social class can account for variations in these orientations, which in turn then shape electoral behaviour.

With the growing aspirations Indian voters more ready to respond to political parties that promise good governance, less corruption, better infrastructure and more efficient social services and will the next round of political agitations focus on economic issues rather than identity. The potential for changes in class structure to impact on long-term political change also points to the value of treating class position as a set of categories that can vary in size substantially.

Gender: For decades, voting in India has been a male-dominated enterprise. Women in India are now casting their ballots more frequently, and in greater numbers. Today, women's turnout has actually been higher than that of men in two-thirds of India's state elections. This is a remarkable turn of events in a deeply patriarchal, conservative society.

Men in India have always turned out to vote in larger numbers than women, as far back as the data goes. In 2004, men held an 8.4 percentage-point turnout advantage over women in national elections. But that gap had shrunk to just 1.8 percentage points now. Indian women are steadily becoming more literate, more educated, and wealthier. This could be making them more politically aware.

State institutions have been trying to make voting easier for women as well. For instance, India's Election Commission has been trying to encourage more women to vote by improving the safety of polling booths to reduce voter intimidation and by setting up separate queues for women on election day.

This is because even though a higher percentage of female voters go to the polls, there is a significant gender imbalance in India's general population. According to the country's 2011 census, the country has approximately 943 women for every 1,000 men. This places India near the bottom at 186 out of 194 countries, according to the World Bank. The sex ratio among India's registered voters is even worse. There are only 908 women for every 1,000 men on the country's voter rolls. However, in 2019 general elections, women's status has become a focal point of campaign rhetoric.

The number of female candidates also has gone up, but there is a long way to go. In 1962, the first general election for which there is data on gender, a paltry 3.7 percent of candidates were women. In the 1990s, the proportion of women running for office began to rise and in 2014, just over 8 percent of candidates in parliamentary races were women. This is a big improvement and yet a tiny proportion in absolute terms. Political parties are inclined to raise voices for female-friendly policies as a hallmark of their agendas.

Religion: India is secular state – by guaranteeing right to freedom of religion to everyone, treating every religion equal and non – recognition of any religion as a state religion – has not been successful in preventing the role of religion as determinant of political behaviour in general and voting behaviour in particular.

The existence of such political parties and neo-political groups as stand linked with a particular religion, for example, Muslim League, Akali Dal, Hindu Maha Sabha, Shiv sena etc., have been one of the reasons behind the continued role of religion as a determinant of voting behaviour. Religious pluralism of the Indian society is a major feature of the environment of Indian political system and it greatly influences the struggle for power among political parties.

The selection of candidates is done with an eye upon the presence of a religious majority in a particular constituency. The candidates do not hesitate to seek votes by playing the religious card with co-religious voters and the secular card with members of others religious communities. Use of religious places for political ends is also a standard practice, particularly during elections. The religionisation of social-political issues is again resorted to by political parties and other groups. Thus, the voters very often vote on religious considerations.

D) Conclusion

India's political system as a developing democratic political system is gradually training the Indian voters. The process of emergence of an issue based political struggle in place of a caste or religion or personality dominated struggle for power is slowly but gradually taking shape. Since elections occupy a prominent place in the democratic government, the behaviour of a voter is influenced by several factors such as caste, class, gender and religion etc. and these variables are important for the sake of winning the battle of the ballot box. However, mere presence of an electoral system does not make a political system democratic. It is therefore, imperative that elections should be conducted in a very free and fair manner. The will of people is expressed through voting in elections and therefore, all undemocratic and unfair means to be avoided in the elections.