

SUBJECT: POLITICAL SCIENCE V

COURSE: BA LLB SEMESTER V

TEACHER: MS. DEEPIKA GAHATRAJ

MODULE: II, VOTING BEHAVIOUR

Determinants of Voting Behaviour In India

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. The force of charisma has its own part to play whereby the voters are influenced by a slogan like “Garibi Hatao”, or “A vote for a pair of bullocks is vote for Panditji and progress”, or “Indira means India, India means Indira”, or “Indira means Dictatorship”, “My heart beats for India” versus “Rajiv means Bofors” and the like. The role of all these factors can be examined in the study of Indian electoral behaviour. There are several factors responsible for voting Behaviour in India. This module will highlight some determinants of Indian voters. In India following main political and socio-economic factors which act as determinants of voting behaviours in our Democratic system;

(1) 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 marvellous 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.”

2. 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 politics has been a well known reality of the Indian political system. 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 Jat Ki Vot Jat Ko, Brahmin votes vs. Jat votes or Jat votes vs Ahir votes etc., are commonly used “principles” for planning an election strategy.

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.” Caste is the main language of voters belonging to rural India. Despite the adoption of democratic values which conceive of a society free from casteism, caste continues to characterise politics in India. Indeed it has become one of the chief means by which the Indian masses have been attached to the process of democratic politics. 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, it must be stated that the role of caste as determinant of the voting behaviour has been undergoing a change, at least in the urban areas. Issue based political struggle is gradually taking its shape in the Indian polity. But the situation continues to be paradoxical.

3. Religion: The establishment of a secular state in India – by guaranteeing right to freedom of religion to every one, 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. The voters very often vote on religious considerations.

4. Language: India is a multi-lingual state. Linguism also serves as factor in voting behaviour. The organisation of states on linguistic basis fully reflects the importance of language as a factor of politics in India. There have been problems in states like that of 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 emotional attachment with their languages, they easily get influenced whenever there comes up any issue relating to language. Linguistic interests always influence voting behaviour.

5. Money Factor: India is a poor country with a large number of people living below poverty line. Money as such plays a vital role in determining voting behaviour of the people in India. A rich candidate or party has always better chances of winning the elections. But it is to be pointed out here that it happens only in normal circumstances and not during a wave-election or when other key issues are involved. Despite organising a very expensive election campaign, the Congress(I) lost power in 1989.

REFERENCE:

Hazarika Biraj (2015), Voting Behaviour in India and Its Determinants, *Journal Of Humanities And Social Science* 20:10, pp 22-25