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Voting behaviour of people in Bihar : A comparative study of Assembly Elections, 2005 and 2010

- Sneha • Tarini Sinha • Arshi Ehsan
- Shabana P. Mallick

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Corresponding Author : Shabana P. Mallick

Abstract : *The study of voting behaviour in India is of immense significance as each election witnesses different and complex electoral trends. There are various psephologists in India who have contributed to the study of voting behaviour and it has come to be regarded as an important aspect of the contemporary political research and theory. Most of these studies are analytical and focus not only on the electoral processes of parties but also on the voting patterns. Such studies are aimed at collecting data,*

comparing voting trends and statistics, record and computation of electoral shifts and swings. Here, an attempt is made to analyze the voting behaviour of Bihar Legislative Assembly Elections of 2005 and 2010 through empirical and comparative study. Party identification, political issues, candidates, campaigns, socio-economic status of voters, and other areas have been recognized as important realms for studies in voting behaviors. Apart from these, are caste and communal factors that have played a prominent role in the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly election in Bihar. The field study and the data collected and analyzed have enabled us to throw light on the changing dimensions of the electoral politics and voting behaviour in the Assembly elections of Bihar in 2005 and 2012.

Sneha

B.A. III year, Political Science (Hons.), Session: 2009-2012, Patna Women's College, Patna University, Patna, Bihar, India

Tarini Sinha

B.A. III year, Political Science (Hons.), Session: 2009-2012, Patna Women's College, Patna University, Patna, Bihar, India

Arshi Ehsan

B.A. III year, Political Science (Hons.), Session: 2009-2012, Patna Women's College, Patna University, Patna, Bihar, India

Shabana P. Mallick

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Patna Women's College, Bailey Road, Patna – 800 001, Bihar, India
E-mail : shabanapmallick@gmail.com

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Introduction :

Voting behaviour is strongly related to the state of democracy. The levels of voter participation is popularly taken as a key measure of democracy. High levels of voting suggest a participant political culture. It indicates faith in the electoral system; low levels of voting might indicate an apathetic political culture or that parties and governments are not subject to the will of the voters. Study of voting behaviour is premised on the idea that the social characteristics of voters explain the way they vote. The important characteristics are age, gender, race, class, education and location. These characteristics determine the circumstance of voters and define the issues that are most meaningful to them. Voting is one of the most commonly used terms in the contemporary age of democratic politics.

The study of voting behaviour started in India in 1967 on a small scale in six institutions and on a bigger scale since 1971. Iqbal Narain, Rajni Kothari, Rameshray Roy and D.L. Seth etc made seminal contribution. But much before that, the first book of voting behaviour was produced in the USA in 1944 and it was entitled *The People's Choice* (written by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet). This was followed by *Voting* (1954) and *The Vote Decides* (1954). The most sophisticated study has been *The American Voter* (1960) by Campbell, Converse and Stokes.

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 relevant'. (Ghai U.R. 2002). Voting behaviour is not confined to the examination of voting statistics, records and computation of electoral shifts and

swings. It involves an analysis of individual psychological processes (perception, motivation and emotion) and their relation to political action as well as of institutional patterns, such as the communication process and their impact on elections. Voting behaviour involves a study of human political behaviour in the context of voting in elections. Voting behaviour studies the mind of millions of people who are involved in the political process as electorates. India is the largest working parliamentary democracy in the world. In a multilingual and multicultural democratic set up like India, voting behaviour is dictated by a plethora of complex issues. Time and again it has been proved that political parties in India can not rely upon any particular factor to win the trust and confidence of the electorates. The voting behaviour studies conducted in India have identified some political and socio-economic factors which act as determinant of voting behaviour. In India, there are various factors which affect the voting behaviour of the voters like caste, religion, gender, personality factor, family influences, party affiliation, political issues, education, apathy etc.

Aims and Objectives:

This research paper seeks to highlight the voting behaviour that influenced the Bihar Assembly Elections of 2005 and 2012.

This research work was undertaken keeping in mind three important objectives.

- To analyze the causes and factors that have led to a change in the voting behaviour of the electorates of Bihar.
- To assess the attitude of the people regarding change of government in Bihar since 2005.
- To suggest certain ways for improving the electoral process and the political system through the opinion of the voters.

Assumptions :

The basic assumptions on which this research work was based are as follows:

- The participation of women was less in 2005 as compared to 2010 assembly elections.
- Communalism and casteism had less influence on the voting behaviour of 2010 elections.
- Women in Bihar are now participating more in policy making.

Methodology:

The research work was an empirical study based on both primary and secondary methods. Under the primary method a set of 15 questions was prepared. It was on the basis of the issues relevant to the problem. Scheduled interview method was used to administer the views of the common people. For content analysis the researchers visited the college library and the departmental library and recent data was collected from internet. The sampling method was ***Incidental cum purposive*** and sample size was 100. Patliputra colony was the universe of the study. Books and Journals were also used in the study.

Elections of 2005 and 2010 :

In 2005 two elections were held in Bihar- March 2005 and November 2010. In March 2005 election none of political parties had the required number of seats and they failed to form the government which led to hung Assembly and finally President rule was imposed in Bihar. In the November 2005 election there was a change of government in Bihar due to anti-incumbency as people were dissatisfied by RJD rule and the President rule and wanted a change. Since 1990 they experienced backwardness and wanted a change in the government. Apart from anti-incumbency there were other factors like casteism and communalism

that affected the voting behaviour of the electorate of Bihar. Prior to 2005 election, caste had been an important factor in Bihar politics. Wooing a specific caste had been the main agenda of many politicians which gave Bihar politics a retrogressive character.

Laloo Prasad Yadav and Rabri Devi followed the strategy of 'MY (Muslim-Yadav chemistry)' voting system but all this failed in 2005 second term elections. Because this time, the motive of the people was to remove the Rashtriya Janata Dal government. The election of Nitish Kumar as the Chief Minister in the year 2005 changed the existing scenario completely.

In his first term starting from November 2005 to November 2010, Nitish Kumar continuously worked for the development of the state. A number of social security schemes were launched by the government.

In the 2010 October – November Assembly Polls, Nitish Kumar was seen as the much awarded Chief Minister who renewed his mandate. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was chosen as the CNN-IBN Indian of the year 2010 in December 2010. He was chosen for this honour for changing the vocabulary of politics, putting development on the centre stage and triggering hope amongst millions.

On examining the voting behaviour of the years 2005 and 2010, it was found that there has been an immense change in the pattern of the voting behaviour of people in Bihar. The change of government in Bihar marked a new beginning. The main difference in the pattern of voting of people in 2005 and 2010 Assembly Elections was that in 2005 anti-incumbency factor dominated Bihar Assembly Election and brought about a change of government, whereas the 2010 Assembly Election retained the same government as it led to the re-election of National Democratic Alliance government. MY factor adopted by Laloo Prasad started weakening in 2005

but was completely overthrown in 2010 Legislative Assembly Elections as the people of minority community voted practically and not emotionally because they also regarded and acknowledged the developmental works done by Nitish' government. Apart from that, the 2010 Assembly polls experienced an unprecedented growth in the number of women voters. Women stepped out of their houses and voted for Janta Dal (United) Bhartiya Janta Party government. In 2010, 54% of the state's 2.5 crore female voters have cast their vote, nearly 10% more than the last elections. Women voters outnumbered men in 23 out of 38 districts in Bihar. More than 60% women voted in 9 districts. This kind of change was not evident in 2005 elections. In 2010 Legislative Assembly Elections each and every strata of the society has increased their voting right. All the voters voted rationally and stood above the barriers of caste. They also considered 'Vikas' or development as the major voting factor. The people of Bihar in general wanted the re-election of Nitish Kumar as the Chief Minister of the State, the charisma and personality of the leader as well as the developmental works done by the Chief Minister was acknowledged by majority of electorates. This kind of wave was not evident in 2005, as people wanted an alternative government but in 2010 voters wanted the re-election of the same political alliance and the same Chief Minister. Thus, the effective and matured voting done by people of Bihar has set an example for all other states. 'Will of the people' is very important and if an underdeveloped state like Bihar where the literacy rate is quite low, can vote so maturely and regard the growth of the state then the other states in India can also vote effectively to bring a positive change in their state. Today, because of change in Bihar, every Bihari proudly says 'Haan main bihari hoon'. Now, Bihar is regarded as a developing state and soon under the guidance of Nitish Kumar, it will regain its past glory.

Result and Discussions:

The research work adopted the necessary strategies in order to gain factual level of information on this issue. The universe of study was Patliputra colony, Patna and schedules were taken as sample for presentation. The questionnaires were given to the respondents and the feedback was recorded. Some of the respondents filled the schedules in the presence of the researchers.

As far as voting in Bihar Assembly elections are concerned, 60% of the respondents voted in both the years, that is in 2005 as well as 2010, 38% of the total respondents voted only for 2010 and 2% of the respondents voted only for 2005, which means the people in Bihar have become conscious about their voting rights. This is a welcome change for a state like Bihar. When people were asked on which basis they cast their vote, then 50% of the respondent answered that they cast their vote on basis of political party as people are able to connect themselves more with the party symbols specially the illiterates and they vote accordingly, 47% of the respondents vote on the basis of work done by the candidate, there are only 2% and 1% of the respondents who vote on the basis of religion and caste respectively. Regarding scrutinizing the details of the candidates before voting 54% of the respondents went through the details of the candidates before voting for them, this again shows that people in Bihar have become conscious and matured. When respondents were questioned regarding the authenticity of the claim that 2010 assembly elections of Bihar was absolutely free and fair, most of the respondents agreed whereas 7% of the respondents were unable to express their opinion on this and 1% did not agree with this statement. The Election Commission as well as the State Government were quite vigilant to prevent any sort of rigging or misappropriation and under the leadership of Sudhir Kumar Rakesh (Chief

Electoral Office) the 2010 assembly elections of Bihar was held in a very proper and fair manner. Regarding the factors that led to the change of government in Bihar maximum percentage that is 40% of the respondents had given insecurity as an important reason for the change of government in Bihar, 24%, 20% and 16% of the respondent have regarded corruption, unemployment and anti-incumbency respectively as the reasons for the change of government. With respect to causes that have led to the re-election of Nitish Kumar as the Chief Minister of Bihar in 2010 election as well as mass voting, maximum percentage that is 40% of the respondents regarded development as the major factor for voting in such a large scale, 22% of the respondents regarded education, 20% of the respondents regarded health and 18% regarded law and order for re-electing Nitish Kumar. When respondents were questioned regarding the influence of family elders on the young voters, 47% of the respondents agreed that young voters were influenced by family elders i.e. they cast their vote according to the preference of the family elders, 40% of the respondents did not agree with this statement and 13% were unable to express their opinion on this, thus family played an influential role in the formation of party identification.

Regarding the reservation of seats for women in Bihar Legislative Assembly, half of the total respondents felt that there should be reservation of seats for women in Bihar Legislative Assembly, 29% of the respondents felt that there shouldn't be reservation of seats and 20% of the respondents were unable to express their opinion on this. This provision of reservation would enable the women to participate more in the policy making process and would accelerate political awakening and empowerment among the women.

Apathy is one of the determinants of voting behaviour which results in reducing the turnout of

voters. In the past apathy had reduced the turnout of voters in Bihar but now the electorate are satisfied with the performance of the government and are ready to participate in the electoral process as 52% of the respondents have disagreed with the statement, 22% believed that apathy had reduced the turnout of voters in Bihar and 26% are unable to express their opinion on this. Previously caste and community dominated the voting pattern in Bihar, but when the respondents were questioned regarding it, 50% of the voters expressed the opinion that people have broken the barriers of caste and have voted for development but 22% people believed that former factors still dominate the voting pattern in Bihar and 28% were unable to express their opinion on this.

The opinion of the voters regarding the proposal of Right to Reject and Right to Recall made by Anna Hazare is such that 73% of the respondents showed their consent for the electoral reforms of Right to Reject and Right to Recall, 16% of the people have not agreed to this proposal as according to them bye-elections are not practically possible and 11% are unable to express their opinion on this proposal.

These are the opinions of the respondents as recorded by the researchers from the empirical study.

Conclusion:

The study of voting behaviour is concerned with the ways in which people tend to vote in public elections. Bihar is an under developed state, where caste and community dominate the election process. But, after 2010 Bihar election, the wall of caste and community seems to have broken to some extent and 'Development' became the major voting factor. The 2010 Assembly Election marked a major change in the voting pattern of people in Bihar, in which every strata or section of society

acknowledged development. The MY factor used by RJD-LJP alliance collapsed and Nitish Kumar's Government came to power with a clear cut majority. The effective and matured voting done by the people of Bihar was acknowledged by the entire nation.

Family was influential in the formation of party identification and women voters did not turn out in sufficient number to vote according to their will and choice. Muslims, Christians, the rich, the poor, the illiterate, the educated, and other groups have shifted their support base from the Congress party to other parties.

The factors responsible for change of Government in Bihar in 2005 was different for different sections of the society. For the higher income group, it was insecurity; for the working class, it was unemployment and for the bureaucratic section, it was corruption that led to the change of Government in 2005.

E-voting and mobile voting should be encouraged. UID (Unique Identity Card) must be made compulsory and should be produced while casting of vote. It would make the election process much fairer as it would reduce the flaws and fallacies. Biometric system and Thumb impression should be introduced to stop false voting and rigging. Our system of elections should change from the FPTP (First Past the Post System) to some variant of the PR (Proportional Representation) system. This would ensure that parties get seats, in proportion to the votes they get.

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