

## Voting Behaviour of Dalits in Bihar: An Analysis

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**Abstract-**The present paper analyses the voting behaviour of dalits in Bihar. It also examines various determinants which affect the voting behaviour of dalits in assembly election. Elections occupy a prominent place in the democratic government. There are many amendment have been done for the extension of the reservation of seats for SC and ST in Parliament and State Assemblies. According to the 95<sup>th</sup> amendment of the Indian constitution on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2010, latest provision have done as extended the reservation of seats in Indian Parliament and State Assemblies for SC and ST from sixty to seventy years. In developing democracies like India, voting behaviour has to play an important role to facilitate the best political stability. The analytical methodology has been used in present study. This study is based on secondary sources. Over last three decades, political participation as well as voting behaviour of Scheduled Caste in Bihar has undergone a tremendous change. This change is often attributed to deeper structural cleavages along the axis of castes, although little, if any, attempt has been done to support or contest such oversimplified formulations with theoretical and empirical underpinnings.

**Key words:** Political Participation, Voting Behaviour, Election, Scheduled Caste.

**Introduction-**Dalit meaning 'broken/scattered' in Sanskrit and Hindi, is a term mostly used for the ethnic groups in India that have been kept depressed by subjecting them to untouchability. Dalits were excluded from the four-fold varna system of Hinduism. Dalits now profess various religious beliefs, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity and various folk religions. The Census of India 2011 recorded their numbers at over 200 million people, representing 16.6 percent of India's population. The term dalits was in use as translation for the British Raj census classification of Depressed Classes prior to 1935. It was popularised by the economist and reformer B. R. Ambedkar, who included all depressed people irrespective of their caste into the definition of dalits. Dalit has

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become a political identity after independence of India. A scheduled caste is the official term for Dalits in the opinion of India's National Commissions for Scheduled Castes.

The rise of Hindutva's role in Indian politics has accompanied allegations that religious conversions of Dalits are due to allurements like education and jobs rather than faith. In India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, Dalits have had a major political impact. In Bihar dalits are play very important role in regional politics. Jagjivan Rak was the first scheduled caste leader to emerge at the national level from Bihar. Vote bank politics are common in India especially in Bihar, usually based on religion or caste. Dalits are often used as a Vote bank. The voting behaviour of dalit voters 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 of 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 particular policy or ideology for the same purpose.

The interest of 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', 'Achhe din Aane wale hain', 'Abki baar Modi Sarkar' and the like. The role of all these factors can be examined in the study of India electoral behaviour.<sup>7</sup>

There are several factors responsible for voting behaviour of dalits in Bihar. Some determinants of dalit voters are following:-

- Caste continues to be a determinant of voting behaviour in India. Caste and sub-caste factor also determine the voting behaviour of voters in Bihar. It is deep rooted in the society and constitutes an important basis of social relations at all levels. Caste is a factor in the selection of candidates for contesting an election from a assembly constituency. Dalit voters are demanded in the name of caste. 'Jat Ki Vot Jat Ko', 'Jat votes Vs dalits votes etc. are commonly used 'principles' for planning an election

strategy. Indeed it has become one of the chief means by which the Indian masses have been attached to the process of democratic politics. A number of seats in the Parliament of India, State Assemblies, Municipalities and Village level institutions are reserved for Dalits or Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). Though seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, they are elected by all the voters in a constituency, without any separate electorate. Also a member of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is not debarred from contesting a general i.e., non-reserved seat. This system was introduced by the Constitution of India in 1950 and was supposed to be in place for the first 10 years, to ensure participation in politics by these groups which were deemed weak and needing special protection under 95<sup>th</sup> Amendment of Indian Constitution, this reservation is to last until 2020.

The establishment of a secular state in India 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 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 places for political ends are also a standard practice, particularly during election. The religion and social-political issues is again resorted to by political parties and other groups. The dalit voters very often vote on religious considerations. Religion is also one of the important axes of social organisation.

India is a multi-lingual state. Linguism is also serves as factor in voting behaviour of dalits in Bihar. The organization 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 of dalits.

One important factor of voting behaviour of dalits is Charisma. This factor also determines the voting behaviour of dalit voters. 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 wave or air of that personality, 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 of dalit voters at the meetings addressed by towering personalities like Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Atal Bihar Vajpayee, Narendra Modi and a sudden change in the mind of the role of charisma in the electoral behaviour by such great figures may be counted as the concrete evidences of the role of charisma in the electoral behaviour of our people.

India is a poor country with a large number of people living below poverty line. Bihar is one of the poor states of India. Generally, poor voters are influenced by some money given by people representative. 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 organizing a very expensive election campaign, the Congress (I) lost power in 1989, NDA-I government in 2004 and UPA-II government lost power in 2014 due to mass level of money scam.<sup>13</sup>

Ethnic pluralism, communalism, regionalism and sub-nationalism are the hard realities of Indian society. Of late sub-nationalism has become a crucial factor in influencing the voting behaviour of the people. At times a secessionist group gives a call for the boycott of elections and uses pressure tactics to forces the voters either not to vote in favour of a particular party. Some regional political parties like some fractions of the Akali Dal, Naga Nationalist Organization, Gorkha League, Jharkha Party, AASU and AAGSP in Assam have raised parochial slogans from time to time and have disturbed the emotional stability of the people of their states. Such actions of some political parties have at times influenced some people to organize themselves on narrow and parochial lines.

Each political party contests elections on the basis of an election manifesto, and after coming into power, it is expected to fulfil the promises made there in Good or bad performance of the ruling party. Just on the basis of the election promises made and promises actually fulfilled influence the basis behaviour of the people in a big way. We experienced it in 2005 in Bihar, when the RJD, which got a majority from 1990 to 2000 assembly elections, could not win even a simple

majority in the very next election held in Feb. 2005 and Oct. 2005 mainly because of its failure to perform successfully.

Mass literacy has been another factor of voting behaviour of dalits in India. It is because of 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 and other 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. Large number of population of Bihar is illiterate till now. However, despite this feature, the common sense and maturity born out of experience of the past has also been playing a big role in influence the voters mind and actions.

A candidate report with the people with constituency or his known qualities or contribution in any value spread of activity always acts as a factor of voting behaviour. Apart from his parties loyalty or opinion on various issue and problem, a 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.

Each party launches a vigorous election campaign for influencing the voters in its favour. Use of such means as mass meeting, street meetings, personal contacts, take food in the house of voters, posters, poster war, speeches by film stars. TV and Radio broadcasts, newspaper advertisement hand bills, processions and propaganda in made to win votes, particularly the floating votes. Election campaign is designed to make a dalits voter believe that this interest can be best served by the party, the candidate of the party contesting from his constituency. Poll eve campaigning plays a role in influence the choice of the voters.

The India political life from the village level to the national level in characterized by factionalism. Neither political party, nor even the cadre based BJP and the two communist parties is free from factionalism. It has adversely affected the strength of the congress is a political party with glorious past, a weak present and not a bright future. Other parties are also suffering from factionalism. The dalit voters are getting disenchanted with some of the political parties because of their inability to overcome factionalism. They are turning to locally organized parties or regional parties which because of their small organizational network and limited operational based are relatively based are relatively less affected by factionalism<sup>18</sup>

Media's role as political actors has been significant in recent times in a democratic society. In our country also, public is continuously exposed to political reports disseminated through various mass media channels. Hardly a day passes without political news in national, state and local newspapers, magazines and in television channels. Political issues, public debates, party papers, candidates news conference, presidential and prime ministerial speeches, deliberations of parliament and state, combine to form weekly diet for mass media consumption in India. During election time, the press gives more stress in communicating more political relevant information to the people. The whole election process is widely covered by the newspapers. The newspaper is both a leader in politics and a reporter of political phenomenon. Dalits voter are also influenced by print and electronic media.

**Conclusions:-**In the light of above facts it can be said that the voting behaviour of a dalit voters is influence by several factors such as caste, sub-caste, religion, 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 of the battle of the vote by EVM in these days. The will of dalits are expressed through voting in elections and therefore, all undemocratic and unfair means like manipulating and rigging need to be avoided in the elections. At present, dalits are often uses as a vote bank in this backward state. But, dalits also want to development and good governance in Bihar. Hence, some dalits cast their vote on the basis of development and good governance, but most of the dalits cast their vote on the basis of caste and sub-caste.

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