



The Voting Paradox In India's Electoral Democracy: An Examination Of Systematic Loopholes In One Man, One Vote System

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Abstract: In democratic India, the principle of 'one person, one vote' is intended to provide each citizens with an equal say in the process of governance. However, this study has been undertaken to examine the declining value of political votes in India, where elections are increasingly influenced by manipulation, and less free and fair. Despite visible protest and public dissatisfaction, many citizens end up with re-electing the ruling party, leading to a cycle of one party dominance. This paper explores how targeted strategies, particularly aimed at common innocent people and vulnerable groups, shape public perception and reinforce political power. By highlighting these tactics, the study seeks to showcases the erosion of democratic norms in India's electoral system. The study is mainly a secondary research based on books, articles, research papers, youtube videos etc.

Key Words: Democracy; manipulation; vote bank; electoral reform; one party dominance

1.INTRODUCTION

"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." ~ Lord Acton.

There was a time, when people fought for universal adult franchise leading to the adoption of the 'one person, one vote' system to ensure democracy in country like India. However, today this system often appears to provide an opportunity for the government to remain in power by manipulating the votes of ordinary citizens. As a result, we now witness political stagnation and dominance of a single party. Only highly aware and critical individuals cast their votes thoughtfully, carefully analysing each party's performance and agendas. It is only through election that power changes from one party to another peacefully and government authority secures the legitimacy thereby (Equbal, 2019). And due to the presence of election that democracy truly embodies government by the people, of the people and for the people. Thus to preserve democracy, each citizen's vote

must be free, fair and protected from manipulation. However, instead of holding the democracy alive, the election mechanism has been facilitating the government to be more corrupt and authoritative. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the voting system, particularly the one person, one vote mechanism to address the declining value of the votes and eroding democratic norms. This paper has divided into five parts under the subheadings accordingly, significance of equal voting in India; problem of equal voting in India; strategies for voter's manipulation; justification for plural voting and need for electoral reform, and finally the conclusion including the suggestion and way forwards.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF EQUAL VOTING IN INDIA

Democratic elections are mechanisms of social choice under conditions of freedom and equality (Schedler, 2002). And equal voting is a requirement of equal dignity. The importance of equal voting can be realized by examining the time without it as power was often concentrated among elites, leading to policies that favored a select few and marginalized the majority. In colonial India, restricted voting rights left millions without representation, allowing policies that perpetuated inequality and served colonial interests. The shift to universal suffrage in 1950 marked a move towards a fair and inclusive democracy ensuring that all citizens have a voice in governance and reducing social inequalities. Thus, voting is the foundation of democracy, it is only through voting people participate in decision making. Voting empowers democracy. The prime advocate of equal voting is John Rawls said that the most obvious political inequality is the violation of the precept of one person, one vote (Estlund, 2023). For him one person, one vote is fundamental principle of democracy and violation of it would be undemocratic and illiberal. John Rawls justifies equal voting rights through his concept, individuals choose principles of justice without knowing their social status, leading them to support rules that protect all citizens equally. Equal voting rights are essential to ensure fair political participation, allowing everyone a voice in decisions that shape society. For Rawls, any denial of equal voting would undermine fairness. According to Rawls, the basic political liberties should be afforded fair value in a just liberal democratic society. He concludes that satisfying the principle of equal participation in practice affords all persons with access to the political process common status of equal citizens (Darby, 2023). Voting provides democratic legitimacy to the government that government is formed by the people and work for the people (Schedler, 2002).

Thus, it was believed that equal voting would foster equality, inclusion and ultimately justice within society. However, it is crucial to assess whether this promise of equal voting rights truly achieves these ideals in current context. Examining it will help to address the systematic inequality in the system.

3. Problems of Equal Voting in India

Before it was thought that equal voting will foster inclusion, equality and justice. On the view of it, the method of one person, one vote was adopted in India. However, does all these votes really count and meaningful?

The government obtains democratic legitimacy through equal voting of the citizens in the election and thereby guarantee the people equality, inclusion and justice. This legitimacy yields to absolute power of the government

that they manipulate the votes of people and use the legitimacy in systematically to remain in power. The justification for equal voting was put forwarded by thinkers like John Rawls cannot be undermine that people should get equal rights irrespective of their background. For him, political equality is not only a means, but civic value of self-government, political liberty, voting, taking part in political life (Estlund, 2023).

The modern history of representative election is a tale of authoritarian manipulation. By conducting the periodic election they just try to obtain electoral legitimacy without running the risks of democratic uncertainty (Schedler, 2002). The election process in India is the precursor of corruption. The use of money power, misuse of caste and religious identities, communalism, informal disenfranchisement, pressurize voters, biasness are so common. All these rise question about the sustaining value of equal vote, where voting is no more fair and free. Besides all these, the ground where the equal voting come into question is that whether all the equal vote remain conscience vote? The answer is no. The parties know whose vote can be attack and manipulate. It is the innocent common people, who are far away from politics, who don't have knowledge of governance, who are not conscious about the corruption. These category of people are mostly poor, illiterate who only continue to involve in voting and remain inactive in direct politics. They are the people who believed that they would only receive goods and services under this government. They have fallen victim to manipulation driven by promises that appeal to their desires. Their opinion is along the lines of like 'we will get ration rice only under this party's government'. They don't aware that ration rice is not a benefit exclusive to one party's government but something they would receive under any government. Such conception leads them to re-elect the same party. Such kind of mind set of the common people is actually result of such a autocratic and namely democratic nation, where people don't have correct knowledge.

India is a thriving democracy when it comes to election, but a diminishing democracy when it comes to equality and freedoms (Hasan, 2024). By the election the government is only acquiring democratic legitimacy and in reality eroding the value of each vote, as which are not free and fair in the sense no more conscious vote but subjected to manipulation. Thus, even after the large long lasting protest against the government, the same party able to comes in power. A kind of political stagnation or domination of one party is witnessing due to such situation. Thus it can be say that equal voting is somehow became the means of political corruption and democratic decline. It cannot be deny that equal voting is a matter of equality, liberty and justice. But in reverse, in the hand of power greedy government it becomes tool of corruption and injustice. Another point is to be noted here that 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 which is influenced by sever irrational forces. The role of political parties, pressure groups, religious and communal factors, influence of money or charismatic personality of a leader have definite influence on the minds of voter (Hazarika, 2015). Thus, both the attempts of parties to manipulate the voters as well as the irrational common people are responsible for eroding value of equal voting.

4. STRATEGIES FOR VOTERS MANIPULATION

There are two categories of people when it comes to political engagement. The first category includes those who are politically active, educated and aware of current events. These individuals are often critical of corruption and injustice and play an active role in political decision. The second category consists of people who are politically inactive, focused primarily on enjoying goods and services and largely unaware of the realities of high level politics or corruption. They are often absorbed in their private lives. Politicians and political parties tend to target this second group, as they can be more easily manipulated through misinformation, appeals to greed and similar tactics. These categories of people can be aligned closely with the categories of political culture identified by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, in terms of parochial, subjective and participant political culture (Almond and Verba, 1974). People under parochial political culture don't have any knowledge and awareness about political system and remain as nonparticipants. People of subjective political culture have awareness about the political system but don't participate and blindly accepts the system. And the people of participant political culture are well conscious of their rights, duties and have knowledge of political system, they are conscious at the same time actively participate in the political sphere by considering themselves as active member of polity. These political culture are also known as cognitive, effective and evaluative politic culture respectively. The first category of people are busy only with family's wellbeing; the second category of people blindly obeys law and don't participate in shaping the laws. Only the third category expected to take part in decision making actively. The participant culture or the active people are most compatible with democratic political structure (Pavone, 2014).

The manipulation of inactive, unaware and often poor voters by the politicians and political parties can be understood through several real life example, where these people are exploited due to lack of correct information or knowledge and resources. The goods provided through ration card is a good example of how political parties manipulate the voters. Many low-income individuals believe that they will only receive these benefits if current government stays in power, leading them to re-elect the same party without concerning the corruption and injustice they made. This misconceptions stems from a lack of understanding that welfare programs are policies intended to support citizens under any government. Politicians exploit this by positioning themselves as sole providers of these benefits. There are many such examples of manipulation. For instance, politicians may distribute blankets, food, or cash just before elections to sway voters with immediate incentives. Some use muscle power to threaten those who may not support them. Secret meetings are often held with uneducated poor groups like tea tribes, where fake promises are made about future benefits. Politicians also use communal, caste and religious identities, appealing to voters on these lines to secure votes based on group loyalty rather than analysing the performance and agendas. These are the real examples of manipulation happening in rural and urban areas, targeting vulnerable voters. Other practices include vote buying, poll related violation, drugs, alcohol, disappear names from voting list, fraud, irregularity, counting defects, rumors etc. They actually know that it is impossible to win election without manipulation and fraud (Martin and Picherit, 2019). Such practices

raise question about the fairness of equal voting or 'one man, one vote' system. When poor and uneducated individuals become victims of manipulation by political parties, their voting rights are compromised, as their choices are no longer based on free will and fair judgement. These votes lack true rationality and conscience, undermines democratic value. Therefore it becomes possible for one party dominance, even after mass protest during their rule by the same party. These electoral regimes are in true sense instances of authoritarian rule (Schedler, 2002).. The people who are active, aware, educated only cast their precious votes after critical evaluation. Thus, do such undemocratic election truly count each votes equally, or is the principle of one person, one vote used merely as a means for politicians to maintain power, where the votes are not justified?

5. JUSTIFICATION FOR PLURAL VOTING AND NEED OF ELECTORAL REFORM

The challenges associated with equal voting in India, where large portion of the population are unaware of the political system and are vulnerable to manipulation, encourage discussion around the concept of plural voting. In this context, plural voting could be seen as a way to ensure more informed and balance decision making. With equal voting, uninformed voters can be easily influenced by politicians, compromising the democratic process. Plural voting, where individuals with awareness and knowledge might have additional voting weight, could potentially reduce manipulation and encourage informed participation in governance. However, implementing plural voting in India would require careful consideration to ensure that it enhances democratic fairness rather than creating new inequalities.

Prime advocate of plural voting, JS Mill quoted that in any state of society in which intelligence was generally diffused, all would have a voice in the election of their representatives; but some ought to have more than one vote. He advocates a double or triple share of vote for the superior with mental qualities, at the same time not depriving those who are inferior of their share (Mill, 1861). Mill's arguments in favor of plural voting is that more 'competence' and educated electorates have greater say, they are likely to choose the right policies for all as well as would lead to more effective and just governance. Mill advocates the plural voting yields to personal injustice by excluding illiterates, on the other it aims at protection of common interest by prioritizing the experts. Mill justifies it with ultimate aim of democratic equality through unequal voting. As equal voting couldn't guarantee democratic elections, thus unequal voting is justifiable so long as that would better protect and promote others liberty. It cannot be deny that equal vote is a requirement of equal dignity. At the time it must also see that if those votes do not have real value in such corrupted election process. Thus, Mill wanted exclusion of some for positive reason, it is for common good instead of fulfilling self interest of power greedy politicians. For him, vote is not a moral right (or personal justice) but a trust for common good. If some can do more for common good that would be definitely acceptable (Turner, 2024). However, John Rawls' justification for equal voting too have legitimate grounds that it is only through casting vote in election common people participates in political life. However, in his theory of justice as fairness, he talks about both equality and difference principle of distribution irrespective of background and quality. But for the interest of least advantage, economic inequality of distribution is acceptable only if they benefit everyone in society. Therefore, in Rawls account ultimate

ambition is well being of everyone, no matter means is equal for all or not. So, justice as fairness implies that living together as equal might in some conditions be best fostered by plural voting (Estlund, 2023).

Thus, the existing electoral system in India is in need of immediate reform, which has lost its democratic character totally. The corruption, fraud and manipulation are continue within it. Election is used by the party to sustain in power so systematically. The hope with equal voting is that it would yield to a flourishing democracy, proved wrong, and what has happening is something reverse. Equal voting becomes a means for manipulate voters. All these lead to criticize the equal voting. And immediate electoral reform must took to save the democracy, to solve the equality, liberty, justice among the people. To solve such undemocratic corrupted election practices, one should have an critical look on plural voting. The goal should be to bring the democracy back, protect common interest and provide effective decision. However, it can not ask for a radical reform and adopting plural voting. Before adopting something new, critical evaluation of conditions must be made. Radical solution is not preferable for a nation like India. However, it must be say that after realising the fear of corruption and manipulation, the thinkers like JS Mill proposed the framework of plural voting framework. And in the current time, the equal voting enables the ruling government to enjoy absolute power, which as Lord Acton noted, tends to corrupt.

6. CONCLUSION

Illiteracy, poverty, lack of awareness and voters disengagement keeps the Indian electoral system in a perpetual state of vulnerability to corruption, putting democracy itself at risk. Although elections are held regularly and people cast their votes each year, manipulated votes undermine the idea of free and fair elections. Consequently, equal voting may no longer be the best fit for India, as it often enables more corruption than accountability. Essential reforms are needed to strengthen the electoral process, focusing on improving voter's education and engagement. Only through informed, free and fair voting can a truly representative democracy be sustained. Hence, while the principle of equal voting has been integral to India's democratic framework, recent challenges suggest that it may no longer fully serve the evolving needs of society. Issues such as political manipulation, voter's apathy, and the concentration of power have raised concern about the effectiveness of a purely egalitarian voting system. Plural voting, as theorized by thinkers like JS Mill, offers an alternative model that could potentially enhance democratic integrity by weighting representation towards informed and responsible participation. However, any shift from equal voting would not be very easy and radical, but it requires careful ethical and legal examination of the condition, exploring such framework could lead to a more accountable, balanced and effective democracy in India – one that is resilient against the risks of absolute power and better equipped to meet the needs of a diverse and complex population.

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