

TRENDS IN ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION AND UNDERSTANDING DEMOCRATIC UPSURGES: EXPLORING THE CONTEXT AND REASONS

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Elections are an integral part of representative democracy. Citizens elect their 'representatives' to whom authority for governance is passed on. Free and fair election is very vital for the legitimacy of governance. Equally important is people's turnout for voting and participation in the electoral process. Higher voting percentage indicates people's faith and trust or acceptability of the political system. According to Sanjay Kumar, 'Elections are a key activity around which a representative democracy evolves. The success and legitimacy of elections hinge on the citizens involvement in voting, and also in the overall election process' (Kumar, 2009). India has so far seen sixteen general elections, the last one in 2014, and many more for state assemblies. People tend to regard elections as 'festival of democracy', and participate in it with enthusiasm. This paper inquires into the electoral participation of the citizens over the decades based on critical reading of literature on elections, and election analysis in India. It examines the turnout trends, and posits that voting turnout has increased significantly over the years, and two democratic surges can be discerned- first, in the 1960s and the second one in the 1990s. The Second democratic upsurge flatted by 2004 and the trend continued till 2009. After 2009, in 2014 there was a considerable jump in the turnout. The paper tries to find an answer for the significant jump in turnout in 2014 general elections.

Elections in India

In India the Election Commission of India (ECI), which is a constitutional body, organises, conducts and oversees elections. Elections in India are held at three levels- for Parliament, for state Legislative Assemblies of various states and Union territories; and for local urban and rural self-governing institutions. While elections for the first two levels of representative institutions are held by the Election Commission of India, the elections for local bodies are conducted by State election commission. State election Commission is a statutory body, not a constitutional body like the ECI. So far 16 elections have taken place for constituting Lok Sabha. The last election was held in 2014. Until the fourth general elections of 1967 elections for the Lok Sabha and the different state Legislative Assemblies were held simultaneously. Since then, as the simultaneity was not maintained for different reasons, such as mid-term dissolution of house on account of fall of government, some of the states have had more than 16 elections for constituting Legislative Assemblies.

Elections are organised on the basis of territorial constituencies for electing representatives. India has adopted the first-past-poll-system in place of the system of proportional representation. In view of India's specific social structure, for ensuring adequacy of representation to the weaker sections of society, namely the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, seats in Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies have been reserved in proportion to their numbers in the total population of the country. Accordingly, 84 and 47 seats are served for SC and ST respectively in present Lok Sabha. There is no provision for reservations in the Rajya Sabha. Besides, the President of India can nominate two persons from the Anglo-Indian community if s/he is of the view that the community is not adequately in the Lok Sabha (Article 331). As regards reservation of seats for women in Parliament and Vidhan Sabhas, the matter was discussed in the Constituent assembly, but the women members of the Constituent Assembly expressed themselves against the idea. For them equality of opportunity was important and it was all that mattered. But later the idea of having political representation reserved for women was mooted in 'Towards Equality Report'. Under Rajiv Gandhi proposal to grant women political representation was accepted, but at the local governance level, though he was not averse to idea to reserve seats for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. A bill for Women's reservation in Parliament and State Assemblies was introduced, factoring in women's inadequacy of representation. Several attempts to pass legislation by different governments providing for women's representation in Lok Sabha, however, has not succeeded. At the third tier of governance- the Municipalities and the Panchayati raj institutions- reservation of seats for have been provided as per the provisions made by the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, and the provision is working fine in the direction of women welfare and empowerment

India is considered to be the largest democracy in the world. This is on account of the size of its electorate. It is huge. The size of the electorate in 1951 when the first general election was held was 17,32,12,343. This has increased to 83,41,01,479 in 2014. This is more than five-fold increase. Beside population, the huge electorate size is also explained by the fact that India has adopted universal adult franchise- a feat which is singularly important given the fact that whereas western democracies have moved very gradually from limited/ restricted franchise to universal adult franchise, India entered headlong at the very start, despite warnings not to do so given the pervasive illiteracy among its population. Nehru and others trumped such warning and arguments by their faith in the wisdom of Indian people and their maturity of understanding of social life.

Participation

Indian electorate has participated in the electoral process with increasing enthusiasm. Over the decades, the number of contestants has been on the rise and also the number of political parties fielding candidates. In 1951 Lok Sabha elections the total number of contestants was 1874. In the last round of elections in 2014, the total number of contestant was 8251. The average number of contestants per constituency has increased from 4.6 in 1951 to 15 in 2014.

The voter's turnout has also been exceptional and has shown a continuous upward trend. There has been ups and downs on the increasing slope of participation, but it has never been below 45.7%, the turnout percentage in 1951. In the last election of 2014 the turnout percentage was a whopping 66.4% - highest so far. Such high turnout is unthinkable in western democracies. It also questions western theorists' arguments regarding connections between class and political participation, namely that the upper and middle class's participation rate in the political-electoral process is far higher than that of the poorer class. We will return to this aspect later.

Another interesting fact about participation in India is that the participation rate has been found to be generally inversely related to the three tier representative institutions. In other words, turnout percentage for local elections is highest, while it is lowest for parliamentary elections. Generally again, the turnout for state assembly elections have been higher than the parliamentary elections. This pattern of turnout is again different from the pattern observed in most western democracies in that the highest turnout happens for national elections and lowest for local elections.

Looking at the rural-urban participation, it is found that before 1970, urban turnout was significantly higher than rural turnout. The difference got narrowed down in 1977 and 1980 elections in 1984, rural turnout surpassed urban turnout for the first time. Thereafter, rural turnout has been consistently higher than urban voting- a pattern has been found across states/regions. In 2004 and 2009 urban voting was nearly 7 percentage points lower than the national average. It may, however, be interesting to note that the voters in small towns showed greater participation compared to those in villages or big cities.

As far as women's participation is concerned, Yogendra Yadav points out that prior to 1996 elections, 'there was very little discernible change' in the proportion of women among voters. But, this proportion changed significantly in 1998 by nearly 3 percentage points and stood at 46.9%.

Retrospectively, an upward trend could be discerned from 1991 (Yadav, 2000).

Compared to men there was in fact a significant rise in the turnout among women. Although the odds that a woman would vote were still lower than a man, there was a non-trivial gain in this respect in the 1990s. After a long stagnation there was a clear signs of participatory upsurge among women. However, there was a great deal of regional/state-wise variation in their participation. Earlier the turnout deficit generally followed the map of women's deprivation with Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan showing the greatest deficit. But post 1991, interestingly, the maximum rise in the proportion of women among voters were in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh.

In 2004, compared to overall turn out, the turnout among women was still 5 percent lower. Without exception, lower turnout among women could be seen in all states. In many states the gap was very wide, except in Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, Punjab and Jharkhand, where gap in turnout was less than 5 percent. Exceptional states where turnout among woman was higher than men were Nagar Haveli, Daman Diu and Lakshadweep. From 2009 women turnout began to increase significantly so much so that the gender gap in turn out began to narrow down considerably by 2014.

Determinants of voting

Chibber and Petrocik posit that in India socio-economic and cultural factors, which are also different from region to region influence voting behaviour in India (Chibber & Petrocik, 1989). Finding out how voters vote is a difficult and complex exercise. What influences or weighs on the minds of the voters at the time of voting and in what weightage, it is extremely difficult to disentangle and claim that this factor or that factor or a myriad combinations has influenced voting. Even in cases of 'electoral wave' elections the reasons for voters voting in a similar way may not be the same..

Study of voting behaviour involves a lot of analysing of voting statistics, and in very important ways, an analysing psychological processes- perception, emotions and motivations, and its link with political behaviour and institutional patterns. Voting is not simply an exercise in rationality. Man is considered to be rational in philosophical sense, but he is not so in economic and political field always. Empirical study of voting behaviour has shown astounding influence of irrational factor and pressures on man's behaviour.

Acknowledging the role of irrational factors such as sentiments (dignity, pride, revenge) is, however, not to deprecate the larger social structural determinants of voting. Caste, class, ethnicity, language, religion all have played and continue to play roles in shaping voters choices. This is quite evident from the manner in which political parties conceptualise /map the electorates and strategize to win votes by taking in to account the social profile of the probable candidates at the time

of ticket distribution and the caste/community profile of the constituencies. Political communications, through social media and campaigning by political leaders and parties work upon these social determinants.

Table No.1: Voters Turnout From 1952 to 2014 (Lok Sabha)

| General elections | Year | No. of seats | No. of electorates | No. of candidates | voting percentage | No. of polling station |
|-------------------|-----------|--------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | 1952 | 489 | 173212343 | 1874 | 44.87 | 196084 |
| 2 | 1957 | 494 | 193652179 | 1519 | 45.44 | 220478 |
| 3 | 1962 | 494 | 216361569 | 1985 | 55.42 | 238031 |
| 4 | 1967 | 520 | 250207401 | 2369 | 61.04 | 243693 |
| 5 | 1971 | 518 | 174189132 | 2784 | 55.27 | 342918 |
| 6 | 1977 | 542 | 321174327 | 2439 | 60.49 | 373910 |
| 7 | 1980 | 529/542 | 356205329 | 4629 | 56.92 | 436813 |
| 8 | 1984-1985 | 541/542 | 400375333 | 5492 | 63.56 | 506058 |
| 9 | 1989 | 529/543 | 498906129 | 6160 | 61.95 | 580798 |
| 10 | 1991-1992 | 534/543 | 511533598 | 8749 | 56.73 | 591020 |
| 11 | 1996 | 543 | 592572288 | 13952 | 57.94 | 767462 |
| 12 | 1998 | 543 | 605880192 | 4750 | 61.97 | 773494 |
| 13 | 1999 | 543 | 619536847 | 4648 | 59.99 | 774651 |
| 14 | 2004 | 543 | 671487930 | 5435 | 58.07 | 687402 |
| 15 | 2009 | 543 | 716985101 | 8080 | 58.19 | 830866 |
| 16 | 2014 | 543 | 834101479 | 8251 | 66.38 | 919452 |

Source: Compiled from the General Elections Statistical Report, website – www.eci.gov.in

The studies of voting behaviour can be divided into two groups: those who adopt sociological approach and those who follow psychological-political approach (Akhter & Sheikh, 2014). In the first approach, ‘socio-economic and ethnic status’ is understood to be the primal/decisive influence on voter’s choice. In the second approach, while the influence of social characteristics such as socioeconomic status, religion, family etc. is recognised, it argues that these characteristics vary very ‘slowly over a period of time, yet crucial fluctuations in national vote occur’ from elections to elections. Such fluctuations cannot be explained by independent variables that do not vary over a brief period of time. Hence, the second approach ‘directs more attention to political objects of orientation such as candidate and the issues, which do shift in short term’ (Akhter & Sheikh, 2014).

The methodology of election studies, even the most sophisticated one have limitation as it would not comprehensively explain voting behaviour. Still it helps social scientists to make sense of what the trend of voting is, especially whenever there is break in the trend.

Voters Turnout

The turnout percentage for Lok Sabha elections from the first to the latest in 2014 is given below.

[see Table 1]

Observing the data, a few broad observations can be made. First, that lowest turnout was in the first general elections in 1951. The turnout was 45.7% but a decade later in 1962, it jumped up by 10 percentage points to 55.4%. In the next election in 1967 there was a further surge of nearly 5 percentage point. The decade of the 1960s thus saw the first democratic surge.

Thereafter, the turnout declined comparatively. There was no clear -growth or even pattern of turnout, except that the elections held after the full term of Lok Sabha (1977,1984,1989 and 1996) attracted higher turnout compared to midterm elections (1971,1980,1991). The midterm elections of 1998 broke this trend as it recorded even higher turnout compared to 1996 ‘normal’ election.

From 1998 to 2009 there was decline in turnout and remained in the range of 58-60%. Post 2009 elections, we notice a remarkable surge in turnout. In 2014 the turnout was 66.4%. The reasons for this surge requires an explanation.

We will return to it later.

Turnout figures for assembly elections aggregated at the national level show an upward trend. In the first two decades, turnout at assembly elections (aggregated nationally) increased with every parliamentary elections. But in the following two decades of 1970s and 1980s, the enthusiasm for voting on state issues declined because of the rise of plebiscitary politics at the national level. Assembly elections became a matter of endorsing the national verdict.

This trend changed after 1989 as politics became 'de-centred' in the 1990s. According to Yogendra Yadav, 'democratic urge found primary expression at the state level' (Yadav, 2000, p. 122). The aggregate national turnout of assembly elections held since 1989 showed an upward trend, especially in elections held between 1993 and 1996, which covered all states except Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir. Generally '...electoral participation in state level politics' was more 'intense than in national politics' (Yadav, 2000, p. 123).

Important to note here is that voters' turnout at the Assembly level was consistently higher than the turnout at the Lok Sabha elections since the 1990s. The average turnout for these elections was 74.64 % , which is considerably higher than the Lok Sabha turnout of 66.4% in 2014.

Higher turnout for assembly elections at the state level makes Indian case different from the so-called advanced countries where turnout at national elections have always been higher than state or local elections (Palishkar.S & Kumar, 2004).

At the third tier of democratic governance, the participation rate has been even higher than that at the state level. We do not have reliable data for voting turnout prior to 73rd constitutional amendment. But episodic newspaper reports suggest that turnout at this level were certainly higher than both the national and state levels. Moreover, participation has been much more involved in the sense that people had engaged themselves in different kinds of political activities. According to Yogendra Yadav, 'non-empirical battles were fought with much more greater intensity and invited much more enthusiastic participation than assembly or parliamentary elections' (Yadav, 2000, p. 123).

From the above, it appears that participation varies by the proximity or otherwise of the tier of democracy to citizen: the closer the democratic tier, the higher is the participatory urge (Yadav, 2000, p. 123). This trend is also unusual in the comparative democratic context: democracies in industrially advanced societies have often reported a lower turnout in local elections (Yadav, 2000).

Explaining Democratic upsurge

The two electoral surges as democratic surges have been noted. The first happened in the 1960s and the second happened in the 1990s. The first upsurge in the 1960s was because of the expansion of participatory base of Indian democracy. The surge in voting is evident from the turn outs in the 1960s compared to the turnout in the 1950s. Voter's turnout had increased at all the levels. One reason for this upsurge was that voters had become far more politically conscious than before because of the political education that they had in the past elections. The other reasons were that the political competition among the political parties became more serious and alternative to the one-party dominance began to emerge. There was also some deepening of participation in the sense that lower castes began to enter the world of politics (Yadav, 2000). All this dovetailed into the first challenge to the Congress dominance of the polity/ party system.

The second democratic upsurge, which happened in the 1990s intensified this downward thrust including all groups that were suffering from one form of social discrimination and backwardness or another. Here, one needs to note that the turnout figures for parliamentary elections in 1989 and thereafter till 1998-99, however, does not suggest any upsurge. These are aggregate figures. And to that extent, they are deceptive in sense that they hide the upsurge at the lower levels and beneath the aggregate figures (Yadav, 2000). In other words, the second democratic upsurge, took place at the state level, not national. Second, it was not the turnout that mattered per se, but the social composition of those who were participating in the political process, especially electoral process.. There was participatory upsurge among socially under-privileged in terms of caste hierarchy, economic class, gender distinctions and rural- urban divide. The socially deprived groups, the 'bahujans', did not 'lag behind the privileged as they did in the past' in coming out to vote and more generally participate in the elections. In fact, in some respect, they were more active than socially privileged. The validity of democratic upsurge can be seen from the participation data disaggregated by social categories. With respect to participation by Scheduled tribes, Yogendra Yadav, uses aggregate data related to ST reserved constituencies, based on the assumption and the fact that these constituencies are invariably areas of high Adivasi concentration. His finding is that after 'lagging behind the average turnout by nearly 10 percentage points', the reserved ST constituencies 'rapidly caught up with the rest' in the 1990s (Yadav, 2000). 1989 was a turning point. Gap reduced significantly in 1989, 1991 and then sharply in 1996. There was further reduction in 1998.

The voting upsurge in the assembly elections during the phase of the second democratic upsurge, is explained by two considerations. First, that politics had got by that time, decentred (Yadav, 2000). The plebiscitary turn that Indira Gandhi had brought in 1971 which fostered higher voting trends for parliamentary election than state assembly election, came to an end by late 1980s. Since the late 1980s, the states entered into the political arena as the main units at which politics 'happen', that is, at which political choices are engineered and executed. Further, the NES 2004 as well as the NES 2009 survey findings show that in the national election the voter's choice was influenced more by the performance of the state government than that of the national government. In 2014 Lok Sabha elections to the performance of the state governments mattered in the voters' choice for the Lok Sabha elections (Paliskar & Suri, 2014) . A very significant factor for the upsurge

of the socially marginal groups, especially the Bahujan samaj, or those who considered themselves as deprived and disadvantaged was the rise of several lower caste based parties, especially in North India. In particular mention must be made of parties such as Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Samajwadi Party (SP), Rashtriya Janta Dal (RJD), Samat Party, Janta Dal- United (JD-U). These parties were involved in the lower castes social and political mobilization for defending the reservation, especially in the context of the upper caste challenge to mandal based reservation policy. The point is that rising propensity of the lower castes to vote was associated with growing and intensifying party competition. Even as the party system was fragmenting, the elections became more competitive, which in turn required much more social-political mobilization by all competing parties.

The effect of participatory urge at the state level election was also felt at the third tier of democratic governance as well. Here, the voter turnout far exceeded the turnout at assembly and parliamentary levels. Yogendra Yadav writes: “Non-empirical work after 73rd constitutional amendment, indicate that electoral battles were fought with much greater intensity and invited much more enthusiastic participation than assembly and parliamentary elections” (Yadav, 2000).

The flattening of democratic upsurge *The story after 1996-98*

After a democratic upsurge the 1990s, described most systematically by Yadav, the participatory pattern of different social groups considered by Yadav more or less stabilized. In 2004, and 2009 the voter’s turnout had flattened at 58.07%, 58.19% respectively. Sanjay Kumar’s detailed study show only marginal increase in turn out by analysing turnout in terms of relevant social categories.

Pattern across social groups

Based on survey data of Lokniti-CSDS for elections between 1996-2009, Sanjay Kumar (2009) points out that Dalits ‘consistently voted more than average and more than most other communities’. But there was some decline in their turnout in 2009 election. Their turnout was lower than the state average in Assam, Bihar Delhi, Karnataka and Maharashtra (Kumar, 2009, p. 49). The turnout of Adivasis was somewhat similar to that of the Dalits. It remained higher compared to the national average, but there was hardly any upward trend compared to previous elections. Barring Karnataka and Jharkhand, the Adivasi turnout was higher than the average turnout in all the other states (Kumar, 2009, p. 49). The participatory situation of the OBC post 1996 did not reveal any clean pattern. After the emergence of political parties specifically addressing the OBC constituency and considerable mobilization, the rise in their turnout was a fair expectation. But that expectation did not hold. It was only in 1996 Lok Sabha elections that OBC turnout was higher than the average. Since then, the OBC turnout has been marginally lower than the national average (Kumar, 2009, p. 49). The turnout among the upper-caste voters was lower than the national average. ‘The turnout among upper castes voters was lower than the average in 1996 and 2004, but has been about average during other elections’ (Kumar, 2009). Muslims participation was close to the national average. In 2009 they voted in much higher numbers compared to 2004. The pattern of higher turnout could be seen in a majority of states. However, lower than average state turnout was found five states- Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

Table No.2: Turnout among Social Communities – Lok Sabha Elections (1996-2009)

| Social Communities | Lok Sabha | Lok Sabha | Lok Sabha | Lok Sabha | Lok Sabha | Average |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| | 1996 | 1998 | 1999 | 2004 | 2009 | |
| All | 57.9 | 62.1 | 60.0 | 58.4 | 58.4 | 59 |
| Dalits | 62 | 67 | 63 | 60 | 59 | 62 |
| Adivasis | 56 | 62 | 52 | 61 | 60 | 58 |
| OBC | 60 | 61 | 59 | 58 | 59 | 59 |
| Upper caste | 54 | 62 | 62 | 56 | 58 | 58 |
| Muslims | 56 | 65 | 67 | 46 | 59 | 59 |

Source: Sanjay Kumar, 2009; 49

Patterns across Economic Class

Turnout among the lower class during 1999-2009 seemed to be marginally higher while that of the middle and upper class was lower than the average turn out. But the turn out among the middle class was not dramatically low, contrary to popular perception. In fact the 2009 election saw a slightly higher turnout among the middle class voters. According to Sanjay Kumar, ‘this was a classic instance of the democratic upsurge levelling off. For a brief period in the 1990s, the poor used the vote as a political weapon more than the rest. Later every section of society wielded this weapon’ (Kumar, 2009, p. 50). Further, Sanjay Kumar writes, ‘the symbolic as well as the actual value of the vote as a weapon of the poor thus eroded as India moved into the new millennium. The churning of the late 1980s and the early 1990s brought more of the poor into the political arena, but in the latter period, this advantage was neutralized by two factors. On the one hand, the post-1998 election saw upper and the middle class voter turnouts go up. On the other, there was a decline in enthusiasm for voting among lower class voters’ (Kumar, 2009, p. 50)]. The pattern of turnout among the upper classes and lower classes was not uniform across all states. In 2009 election, while the turnout among different classes of voters in some states conformed to the national trend and of a marginally higher

turnout among the lower classes, others defied this pattern. In Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Rajasthan and Karnataka, 'the lower class turnout was lower than the upper classes', while , 'in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal, the lower class turnout was substantially higher than that of the upper class voters', and only 'marginally higher in Punjab' (Kumar, 2009, p. 50).

There was much talk about the young voters in the 2009 elections. Congress's better than expected performance was being attributed to the large turnout and support of the young voters for the Congress. But the post poll survey by Lokniti indicate that this belief could be incorrect, as the turnout among youth in this election was about 4% lower than the national turnout (Kumar, 2009, p. 48). The Election data of the Lokniti indicate that during 1999-2000 the youth turnout had 'always been lower by 3 to 4 percentage points compared to national turnout' (Kumar, 2009) .

On the whole, with all these variations in the turnout of various social categories across the regions, the analysis of Sanjay Kumar shows stabilization in the the voters turnout between 2004 and 2009, and he comments that this stabilization was a kind of restraining effect of representative democracy and its routine electoral participation on popular upsurge in a democracy (Kumar, 2009). But then by 2014 the picture changed drastically. The 2014 turned out to be a historic election as voting turnout with 66.4% was the highest so far, reflecting a jump in turn out by almost 8 percentage points, which was unprecedented.

What happened between 2009 and 2014?

The 2014 general elections was a trend breaker election. After 30 years, the electorate had given a clear mandate to Bhartiya Janta Party, bring an end to the long phenomena of hung parliaments. For our purpose here, the significance of 2014 is also for the fact that it is marked by highest ever voters turnout at 66.4%. The last highest was in 1984, when turnout was 64.1 percent. Given the analysis, as mentioned above that voting turnout had stabilized by 2009 and it was moving in the range of 61.9 % to 58.07 % from 1989 to 2009, the turnout at 66.4 percent was exceptional- a clear 8 percent increase. Explaining voting behaviour is never easy. Still a few safe hypothesis can be offered to explain. One major explanatory factor is the emergence of Narendra Modi as a decisive, incorruptible, down to earth leader, who was offering development and promise of '*acche din*'. Modi's branding as a Development Man, and as a *Hindu Hriday Samraath*, with his background of successful leadership in development, via the 'Gujrat Model' and his reputation as an *avant garde* Hindutva proponent, Modi had a huge traction among people across all social groups and age groups. The other explanatory variable can be the renewal of the BJP's OBC strategy or what Govind acharya called 'social engineering' to increase the support base among the lower OBCs and Dalits. This renewal was much needed to expand BJP's social base beyond its limited upper -caste, urban support base, which it had done once in early 1990s, only to lose newly acquired support by sidelining OBC leaders like Kalyan Singh, Uma Bharti, and et.al. Modi himself played the OBC card well (Pandit, 2004). During campaign he would often refer to his OBC background. On the other hand, the OBC parties (SP,RJD, JD -U) which had 'held promise of representing the democratic upsurge and radically restructure the society had reached a dead -end in their OBC politics due to the perception that they were interested only in perpetuating the political dominion of certain OBC groups around one leader or a certain family' (Paliskar & Suri, 2014). In drawing in the support of the all caste groups, the RSS campaign of '*samajik samrasta*' ,easily congealed with 'social engineering' to achieve the effect of Hindu consolidation, which for long has been Hindutva's goal. 'Mandalization of the BJP' did not erode the support base among the Upper caste voters , perhaps because voters had learned or believed that both can prefer BJP without jeopardising their own interests (Paliskar & Suri, 2014). In Bihar two-thirds and in UP three-fourths of the Upper castes voted BJP (Paliskar & Suri, 2014). This was in effect Hindu consolidation.

These two factors for the BJP brought huge shift of voters as well as additions in its favour. It was more pronounced among the backward caste voters, especially the lower castes OBCs. About onethird OBCs voted for the BJP, constituting 40 percent votes that BJP got. Compared to 1998- its best earlier performance,- BJP got 8% more OBC votes, 10% more SC votes and 14 % more STs votes. As Chibber and Varma point out, BJP for 2014 had stitched an unprecedented coalition, and accordingly got the huge surge of votes in its favour. While it retained the support of the traditional social conservatives, in this election, it also mobilised voters who favoured less state intervention in the economy, less subsidies, and less business regulations (Chibber & Verma, 2014). As a result, BJP's vote share surged from around 19 % to 31 %, a mammoth 12 percent jump in vote share. In this context , the massive jump from 58.4 percent voter turn to 66.4 percent in 2014, can be attributed to the stellar cross caste-class electoral mobilization by the BJP under Modi's leadership, especially in North, Central and West India- the most 'electorate-ly' populous regions, and also in regions not considered BJP's traditional bastion (Chibber & Verma, 2014).

Concluding remarks

Elections in India have been truly periodical, and generally free and fair. The legitimacy of the electoral outcome has never been in doubt or questioned by people or the participants in the election fray. There has never been any hiccup relating to peaceful transfer of power from incumbents to the newly electorally anointed leadership. All this show the legitimacy of the electoral process and its outcome. As a result people's faith in the democratic system has increasingly got reflected in the increasing voting turnout over the last 16 general elections. Voters in India have used their franchise for changing governments, for patronage benefits, for expression of solidarity, and expression of dignity, or even display of agency. Until 2104, India witnessed two democratic surges, both related to greater social and political mobilization of marginal social groups, mainly against the establishment that Congress represented, seeking opportunity, power, honour and equality. The third upsurge in turnout in 2014 is best explained in terms of Hindu consolidation, as BJP managed to get a rainbow coalition of social support across the caste groups of Hindu society. This upsurge was distinctly different from the two previous democratic upsurge in the sense that they were arraigned against the Congress and the Upper caste dominance of the party system, and to that extent it had sectarian basis

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