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# SCIENTIFIC AND POLITICAL DEBATES RELATED TO THE STUDY OF ELECTIONS IN INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

Election studies (which are here defined as scholarly work focusing on the major phases of the electoral process, *i.e.* the campaign, the vote, the announcement of results and subsequent government formation) constitute a distinct sub-genre of studies on democracy, which focuses, so to speak, on the 'mechanics' more than on the 'substance' of representative democracy. The election system is the pillar of Indian democracy. The system consists of various levels of elections to the Lok Sabha (the House of Representatives of the Union), State Legislative Assemblies, and Panchayati Raj Institutions (local self-governing bodies under State Governments). This article includes a review of studies related to the elections of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies conducted up to the present time. Studies are divided into those based on aggregate data and those based on survey data of the individual electorate. This division has the advantage of providing data that may be used in different analytical areas. Voter turnout and votes polled by party are the two main variables to be explained. This review article thus shows what has been explained in voting behaviour in India up to the present time.

**KEYWORDS:** Elections, Political Science, India, Media, Democracy, Methodology

## INTRODUCTION

Since her independence in 1947, parliamentary democracy has been the central political mechanism governing India. Between 1975 and 1977, there was a brief disruption during the National Emergency Period. This disruption resulted from the crisis of the political economy beginning in the latter half of 1960's. The election system returns representatives of the people to the Lok Sabha (House of the People in the Union) as well as to State Legislative Assemblies (House of the People in the State) every five years. This system has been the pillar of the Indian democratic regime. In a sense, elections form the essence of Indian democracy.

Elections are conducted at various levels of the federal structure in India. There is the nation-wide election for Lok Sabha (House of the People) that consists of 545 members. Of these, 543 are elected directly by the people from constituencies on the basis of the single-member electorate system (or so-called first-pass-the-post system), and the President from the Anglo-Indian community selects the remaining two members. At the State level, there is an election for the State Legislative Assembly. Members of this body are also elected directly by the people of the constituencies in the same manner as that of the Lok Sabha.[1] At present there are in total about 4000 Members in the Legislative Assemblies. What is unique about these elections is that there are seats exclusively reserved for the socially weak and discriminated stratum of people: Scheduled Castes (= SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (= STs). Seats are reserved on the basis of the proportion of the population of these groups. The former are people of castes that were historically and are even now discriminated against on the basis of untouchability. The latter are those from socially backward communities living in

rather isolated areas and with particular cultural traditions. In line with constitutional provisions, the Central Election Commission of India presides over elections for these two tiers of the election system.

At the grass-roots level, there are elections for local bodies like the three-tiered Panchayati Raj system in rural areas and municipal governments in urban areas. But the elections and functions of these local bodies were inactive in many States until the 1980's because of political inertia or pretexts of State governments. In view of such a state of affairs in local bodies, the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments were passed by Parliament in 1992 to provide a constitutionally mandated status for local bodies. As a result, by enactment of each State government, the three-tiered Panchayati Raj System, consisting of the *zilla parishad* at the district level, the *panchayat samiti* at the block level, and the *gram panchayat* at the village level, was regularised for rural areas. The five-year term was prescribedto be the term of office, and the election at the end of the term was to be conducted strictly under the State Election Commission. The reservation for socially weaker sections of people was also prescribed for SCs, STs, and women. The devolution of financial resources from the State government to the Panchayati Raj bodies was also prescribed.[2] On the basis of the 74th constitutional amendment, municipal bodies were similarly regularized.[3] With the full establishment of the Panchayati Raj system and municipal bodies based on the constitution, the competitive election system was extended to the grass-roots level.[4]

One level of election is related to other level of election. As a whole, this constitutes a network of election politics in contemporary India, and is the basic framework of India's democratic regime. Any research related to the politics of India necessitates study of the electoral process in one way or another. There are so many electoral studies, if "electoral study" is defined as one with at least some analysis of the electoral process

Source: Election Commission of India, Reports of General Election of various Lok Sabha elections

# INDIAN ELECTION STUDIES

## Politics of India and Election Studies

The trend of election studies in India has been influenced by the evolution of actual electoral politics, especially those of Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assembly elections. In addition, theoretical development of election studies in developed countries, especially the United States, has inspired an upward trend in election studies in India. Studies on voting behaviour, notably the Columbia and Michigan studies, have had an impact on studies in India relative to determining what the important research questions are. Party identification, issues, candidates, campaigns, socio-economic status of voters, and other areas have been recognised as important realms for studies in voting behaviours. But because of peculiar elements that are characteristic of Indian society, such as caste, electoral studies in India have unique features. In this section, actual electoral politics are discussed as the context for election studies.

Elections of both Lok Sabha and State Assemblies were conducted simultaneously and regularly till the 1967 elections.[5] Both levels of elections are considered to be pacesetters, not only in electoral politics but also in India's overall political process. Politics during the Nehru era was, basically, stable, in spite of the occasional failure and turmoil, such as in the border war with China in 1962. The relatively stable politics until Nehru's death in 1964 seems to be one of the main reasons why the election studies were not so flourishing in this period in comparison to the period after the 1967, though studies of these elections were conducted on every major election.

The strength of the "Congress system" until mid-1960s, named by Kothari (1964), could be explained by the

capacity of the organisation of the Congress party networking the dominant social groups through, for example, factions, and linking them with the party structure. The "Congress system" was considered to be, in a sense, an effective channel for mobilising popular support in the election, and also putting popular demand on a higher political level, like the State Legislative Assembly or Lok Sabha. With the electoral performance of the Congress party being stable, the "Congress system" could be understood as the very essence of Indian political system. Many scholars thus studied it extensively, including, Brass (1965), Weiner (1967), Sirsikar (1970), Sission (1972), and many others.

The stability of the Congress-centric "one party dominant system" was shaken in the 1967 general election, when the Congress Party for the first time sufferemany States. The possibility of change in the ruling party of the centre thus grew large. For the first time since India had become independent, destabilization of the "Congress system" and the increasing possibility of changes in the ruling party through elections attracted the interest of many political scientists and journalists. This resulted in an upsurge in election studies. Thus, it can be seen that election studies proliferated in the latter half of the 1960's.

Destabilization of the "Congress System" was at its highest in the declaration of a national emergency in 1975. This lasted until 1977 when Congress, led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, lost the Lok Sabha election for the first time at the centre. The period between the 1967 Lok Sabha election and that of 1977 was a period of increasing turbulence and fundamental transformation of Indian politics in accordance with deep-rooted socio-economic changes in Indian society. Hitherto downtrodden people, like SCs, STs, and so-called "Other Backward Classes"[6] began to assert themselves in a more dignified manner within the context of a weakening tie of feudalistic social relations and social modernization. With increasing social conflict and political turmoil, this period of transformation was also a period of decline in the ruling party's ability to govern, whether in Congress or elsewhere. Kohli (1991) provides a good illustration of the turbulent process of transformation. Instability in Indian politics had gradually settled down, Within the above process, the Congress System finally disappeared, and an era of frequent changes in the ruling parties, development of a multi-party system, and formation of a coalition government at the centre emerged at the end of the 1980's. Scholarly interest in party politics and elections increased once again after the Lok Sabha election of 1989, indicating a second upsurge in election studies. The structural transformation of the party system and frequent changes of the ruling party/coalition through elections probably attracted scholarly attention to electoral politics. Research intensified again, and many election studies, especially on the Lok Sabha election, emerged to some extent, by the 1990

Before proceeding to that, I would like to mention the problem of reliability of the election statistics of India. The reliability of election statistics may not be perfect. There are many cases of corrupt practice in the election process such as booth capturing, violence or intimidation against weaker sections of people, provocation of communal sentiments, distribution of money among the electorate, personation, misuse of official power and machinery by the political party in power.[7] The power of the Central Election Commission is, by and large, strong enough to contain major incidents related to these corrupt practices. It is very difficult for any party to systematically interfere with the electoral process, manipulate electoral results, or win elections against the control of the Election Commission. Some studies show that the police, who have an important role in controlling electoral malpractice, are by and large neutral in conducting their duties.[8] But the case of Jammu and Kashmir may be an exception. It is said that many elections in Jammu and Kashmir in the past were not free and fair, except for those conducted in 1977 one.[9] Thus, except for the problematic State of Jammu and Kashmir, it is legitimate to use aggregate electoral statistics maintained by the Election Commission for election studies.

In the following sections, studies based on aggregate data are first examined because these election statistics are well documented from the first general election to the present. Further, on the basis of these statistics, it is easy for many scholars to study basic and long-term trends of elections such as the level of electoral participation or the electoral strength of each party. Although the aggregate data cannot and the most recent reveal details of the voting behaviours of the electorate, they can show most accurately how voters behaved as a whole. Studies that were based on detailed surveys of individuals using large-scale sampling and conducted contin2. Studies Based on Aggregate Data

Many studies of Indian elections are journalistic and descriptive. They tend to be based on case studies or surveys of individual voters looking into various aspects. Such aspects include among others the selection of candidates, the electoral campaign process, actual voting behaviours of individual voters like political perceptions and party preferences, and socio-economic status. These studies are very useful for understanding the electoral processes of parties and the voting behaviours of individual voters such as who votes for whom, for which party, and how. The period and scope of the studies are usually very limited because there is little data coverage in each study. Usually, each study includes examination of only several case studies simultaneously or only a few hundred or thousand individual voters (using questionnaire surveys) at maximum and on the basis of one or two elections. So, based on these studies, it is difficult to understand the over-all structural patterns of electoral behaviours and/or long-term changes in patterns. The only exceptions to this are surveys of the Centre for Studies of Developing Societies, and this is discussed later.

Use of aggregate election data cannot be avoided if macro and long-term patterns of voting behaviour are to be understood. Fortunately, because of the efforts of the Election Commission, such aggregate data are almost complete in India. The web site of the Election Commission provides all the necessary data concerning both levels of elections.[10] Constitution-wise voter-turnout, details of votes polled by each party, and other details of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections are available for analysis. In terms of the number of publications, studies based on aggregate electoral data occupy a rather minor portion of election studies. However, it is best to examine them first in order to understand the outline of elections in India. Although aggregate data usually describes only a few aspects of macro trends or patterns, such clearly depicted aspects can provide a firm context for understanding Indian elections.

Studies based on statistical analysis of aggregate election data, especially those of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, began to emerge after the 1970's. Major studies include those of Elkins (1975), Dasgupta and Morris-Jones (1975), Weiner (1977), Blair (1979, 1990 and 1993), Brass (1980 and 1993), Dikshit's collection of papers (1995), Chhibber (1999), Chhibber and Nooruddin (1999), and Kondo (2003). These studies correlate voter-turnout, votes polled by major parties, and other variables with various socio-economic aggregate variables. These studies are included in the category of "ecological studies".

Elkins' research was carried out on State Legislative Assembly election data and it was early pioneering ecological analysis in India. His study was based on data of four southern States from 1952 to 1967. It showed the importance of the State political context, literacy rate, the development of regional communication in explaining turnout, and the number of candidates.

Dasgupta and Morris-Jones conducted another major study of the early period. They also tried to discover a socio-economic basis for electoral data and examined the relation between socio-economic data and election data of State Legislative Assemblies from 1952 to 1967. The latter included data on electoral participation, competition, and party preference. However, their study seems to have been unsuccessful in finding a meaningful correlation between

socio-economic and electoral data, except in the case of electoral participation or turnout.

The series of Blair's studies on Bihar focused on the socio-economic basis of elections. For example, he examined ethnicity variables such as caste, religion, and others as explanatory variables for the votes polled by candidate and party, or turnout. He showed that the Muslim population tended to vote for candidates of the same community, and that the more Muslims or SCs, the lower the turnout. This was based on data for the period up to 1972.[11] He also examined data of both the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies from 1977 to 1985 in Bihar. This showed a lack of continuity of the support uously for several elections did not emerge until the 1960's base of major parties between elections, the importance of caste and religion, and the relevance of the, agricultural development, and urbanization on the other. Kondo's analysis was conducted on data including both electoral and socio-economic variables. The two sets of variables were adjusted through proportional distribution so that the geographical boundaries of both categories of data would be consistent with one another. Scrutinizing past studies, analyses were carefully conducted to avoid failure resulting from the "ecological fallacy". The long-term analysis produced interesting findings including: (1) the positive correlation of development variables such as literacy and agricultural development for the electoral turnout, (2) the significant change of the sign of correlation of urbanization for the turnout from positive to negative, (3) the weak but positive contribution of party competition toward increase in turnout, (4) increasing significance of the State as political unit, and (5) the overall decreasing trend of significance of socio-economic variables as explanatory variables for turnout.

Several important points can be made about these studies:

- The magnitude of correlation or the power of explanation of aggregate socio-economic variables is higher when explaining the level of electoral participation, namely, turnout, in comparison to votes polled by parties. The percentage of votes of a party is more difficult to explain using aggregate socio-economic variables. For voters, whether or not to participate in an election seems to be a different psychological process than party preference. The former is more likely to be restricted by macro socio-economic structure, while the latter is not. The psychological process of party selection may be a more individualistic process depending on the socio-economic status of the individual voter, such as caste, ideology or value system. This is very difficult to examine using aggregate data. Analysis based on survey data of individuals seems to show such relations better than analysis based on aggregate data.

- Among socio-economic variables, development variables such as literacy or economic development correlate positively with voter's electoral participation. This is shown by many studies. However, the explanatory power of these variables seems to gradually decrease in the long term.

- Urbanization was positively correlated with turnout before the 1960's. Its explanatory power has gradually decreased and became negative after the 1990's.

- "State" as a unit of integrated polity based on common social and cultural traditions has become a significant variable prescribing voting behaviours as a whole, including electoral participation. This is seen in many studies. It is not strange that "State" has becoming more important as an explanatory variable when it is taken into consideration that patterns of social mobilization of the electorate have developed in line with the socio-economic variety and vastness of States. In the era of multi-party system and coalition governments, regional parties, which are closer to the people, have become more important. Their importance in elections is not only for turnout but

also for the party-preference also, which is to be mentioned later.

India is a highly heterogeneous and fragmented sub-continental society. It is, therefore, impossible to ignore the problems of social cleavage based on language, caste, religion, class, and other such variables. It is usually very difficult to analyse these problems for ecological studies based on aggregate data. It is probably better to rely on the precise information that individual-based survey or case studies can provide. For example, such information includes data on who votes for which party. Individual-based or case study-based research can effectively check possible ecological fallacies in aggregate data based studies. Individual-based or case study-based research, as a whole, constitutes a rich depository of information on electoral behaviour. It would be very useful to utilise information to make up for the shortcomings of studies based on aggregate data and to check the possibility of ecological fallacy.

In the next section, we would like to examine what the studies of aggregate data can not tell by reviewing studies based on survey data.

## SCIENTIFIC AND POLITICAL DEBATES

Debates around the study of Indian elections involve political and scientific arguments which are sometimes difficult to disentangle. These debates underline that no method is politically neutral, and they illustrate the particularly problematic relationship of one discipline, political science, with the political sphere and with the media.

The opposition between case studies and survey research can be broken into a series of dilemmas and choices.

The first dilemma concerns the most relevant unit of analysis: should one privilege width or depth? The central difficulty here is often to combine feasibility and relevance. In his introduction to a series of case studies done in the 1960s and 1970s, Shah writes:

A major limitation of the survey method is its inability to capture the influence of local politics on the electoral behavior of small communities. A questionnaire administered to individual voters can elicit information about individual attitudes and opinions but cannot capture the larger reality of events involving a collectivity of individuals acting over a longer period of time. A fieldworker who knows the community is better equipped to capture that reality (Shah 2007: 12).

As we saw, case studies, focusing on a limited area,[14] do offer historical depth, for example in Brass (1985). The anthropological brand of case studies also offers 'cultural' depth, through a wealth of concrete details which suggest the multiple meanings of elections for voters. However survey research allows generalizations; and it contextualizes results by identifying patterns, linked to regions or social groups.

The second dilemma concerns quantitative *vs.* qualitative methods. This opposition cannot be reduced to the use of figures vs. words. While many case studies involve some quantified description of the vote, they are deeply qualitative in nature, insofar as they aim at uncovering the *qualities* of *particular* political trajectories—of a community, a party, a constituency, a state etc. Survey research on the contrary aims at revealing *general* patterns. Here again the question of feasibility is central: while surveys are expensive, case studies are time intensive.

An important dimension of that dilemma relates, again, to the capacity of these two types of methods to capture the meaning of elections for voters. Survey research, functioning with closed questions, conveys only the meanings that the survey design has anticipated, and risks perpetuating the prejudices of its authors.[15] By contrast, qualitative methods such as open interviews and direct observation are more likely to bring out unexpected interpretations.

However one large consensus appears to bridge the divide between survey research *a la* CSDS and case studies: the 'ecological' approach is preferred to the 'strategic' approach of elections. Ecological analyses 'correlate electoral with other kind of aggregate data'. They focus on 'the sociological characteristics of voters, which determine the construction of their representation of politics and their social solidarity' (Hermet *et al.* 2001: 31), whereas the 'economical' or strategic approach is based on methodological individualism and the problematic of the rational voter.

The evolution of National Election Studies (NES) conducted by the CSDS since 1996 shows an attempt to develop increasingly ecological types of analysis, by introducing more and more variables in their considerations. Indeed the latest surveys come close to meeting the advantages of ecological approaches as explained by Brass: 'Identifying the underlying structural properties of party systems, presenting time series data to discover trends in voting behavior, identifying distinctive regional contexts in which voting choices occur, and [...] discovering unthought-of of relationships through the manipulation of available data' (Brass 1985: 4).

A recent exception vis-à-vis this consensus is Kanchan Chandra's work on 'ethnic voting' (Chandra 2008), which analyses electoral mobilization as a mode of negotiation used by marginal groups. Chandra argues that the poorer groups in India use their vote as 'their primary channel of influence'. In a description of 'elections as auctions', she argues that the 'purchasing power of small groups of voters' depends 'upon the degree to which electoral contests are competitive' (Chandra 2004: 4). Her interpretation of the relatively high turnout in Indian elections, even as one government after the other fails the poor, is a materialist one:

The above dilemmas are extremely widespread, but in the Indian context they also correspond, to some extent, to academic rivalries between scholars and institutions, which might explain their persistence over time.

One can identify, to start with, an implicit rivalry between political science and psephology—even though the latter can be considered as a sub-discipline of the former.[17] A few texts, but also interviews, reveal a mutual distrust, both in scientific and political terms. Indian political science values theoretical work more than empirical research; qualitative more than quantitative methods;[18] politically, it favours a radical critique of the political system.[19] Survey research, of course, is essentially empirical, quantitative and 'status quoist'. Yogendra Yadav thus sums up the situation that prevailed in the late 1980s:

The label 'survey research' stood for what was considered most inappropriate in the third world imitation of American science of politics: it was methodologically naïve, politically conservative and culturally inauthentic (Yadav 2008: 3).

Even today, quantitative methods, which are much fashionable in American (and more lately in French) political science, are hardly taught in the political science curriculum of Indian universities. Thus Kothari's endeavor to launch a 'so-called 'new political science'' in the CSDS in the 1960s—this was the time of the behaviorist revolution in social sciences—was a lonely one. He describes this ambition thus:

[It] was mainly based on the empirical method leading to detailed analytical understanding of the political processes The 'people' came within that framework, as voters and citizens with desires, attitudes and opinions; our task as academics was to build from there towards a macro-theory of democracy, largely through empirical surveys of political behavior (by and large limited to electoral choices) but also through broader surveys of social and political change (Kothari 2002: 60-61).

This project actually seems to be realized through the Lokniti network which links the CSDS data unit with a number of colleges or universities across the country (and thus contributes to training an increasingly large number of students who are then hired as investigators for National and State Election studies).

As far as the political agenda of survey research is concerned, Yadav makes a passionate plea for 'transfer as transformation' (Yadav 2008: 16) *i.e.* for an adaptation of survey research to the political culture of countries of the global South, with a double objective: (i) to make survey research more relevant scientifically; (ii) to use it as a politically empowering device, that is ' to ensure that subaltern and suppressed opinions are made public' (Yadav 2008: 18).

Much of the latent opposition between psychologists and other political scientists is probably due to the disproportionate visibility of psychologists when compared to other social scientists working on elections. But the close connection between psephology and the media is a double edged sword. On the one hand, it offers researchers a much needed financial support:

Some of the leading media publications like the *Hindu, India Today, Frontline* and the *Economist* supported [National Election Studies] between 1996 and 1999 (Lokniti team 2004: 5375).

On the other hand, it forces them to engage with the scientifically dubious, and economically risky, exercise of predicting results,[20] or explaining them immediately after their publication. However, the consistent transparency and critical self-appraisal of surveys conducted by the CSDS goes a long way in asserting their scientific credibility:

A more explicit and constructive debate has been taking place, lately, between psephology and anthropology. Notwithstanding his refusal to 'participate in methodological crusades on social sciences' (Yadav 2008: 4), Yadav has consistently sought to situate, explain, improve and diffuse his brand of survey research on elections[21]. His call for a 'dialogue', elaborated upon by Palshikar ('how to integrate the methods and insights of field study and survey research' 2007: 25) has been answered by Mukulika Banerjee, who is currently directing, along with Lokniti, an unprecedented project of Comparative Electoral Ethnography, which aims at 'bringing together the strengths of large-scale and local-level investigations' accessed in May 2009).

## POLITICAL ISSUES

One can distinguish three types of relationship between elections studies and politics, which correspond to three distinct, if related, questions. Firstly, how do elections studies meet the need of political actors? Secondly, to what extent are they an offshoot of American political science? And thirdly, what representation of democracy do they support?

Firstly, the development of survey research is directly linked to Indian political life:

In the 1950s there were virtually no market research organizations in India. The dominance of the Congress diminished any incentive to develop political polls (Butler *et al*. 1995: 41).

At the time of the second non-Congress government at the Centre (1989-1991), political parties started commissioning surveys which they used to build their electoral strategy (Rao 2009). Indian elections have been decided at the state level since the 1990s, and the proliferation of national pre-poll survey from the 1991 election onwards can be linked to the uncertainty of the electoral results in a context of increasing assertion of regional parties (Rao 2009). The fact that the CSDS resumed its elections series in 1996 is doubtlessly linked to the transformations that have been characterizing the Indian political scene since the beginning of that decade. The rise to power of the Bahujan Samaj Party

in Uttar Pradesh and its emergence in other North Indian states, and more generally the fragmentation of political representation, with new parties representing increasingly smaller social groups, has made it increasingly necessary to know who votes for which party in which state—and why.

Furthermore the decentralization policy adopted in 1992 has generated a lot of interest both from actors and observers of Indian politics. Today the newfound interest for ethnographic, locally rooted types of election studies may well have to do with the fact that the national scale is increasingly challenged as the most relevant one to understand Indian politics.

Secondly, a more covert, but no less important aspect of the debate relates to what could be roughly called the 'Western domination' of survey research. Methods have been learnt by leading Indian figures in the United States or in the United Kingdom (even in the 2000s, CSDS members get trained in the summer school in survey research in Michigan University). Authors are often American (or working in the American academia). Funding often involves foreign funding agencies.

More importantly, the key concepts of survey research are often drawn from the rich field of American election studies,[22] and particularly from behaviorism, a school of thought which is rejected by part of the Indian academia. Lastly, the general (and often implicit) reference to which the Indian scenario is compared is actually the United States and Western Europe. On the one hand, these comparative efforts[23] testify to the fact that India is not an outsider any more as far as democracies are concerned. On the other hand, one can regret an excessive focus, in comparisons, on the West, insofar as it skews the assessment of the Indian case (for instance the Indian pattern of voter turnout, which is qualified as 'exceptional' by Yadav because it breaks from the trend observed in North America and Western Europe, might appear less so if it was compared, say, to post-Apartheid South Africa).[24]

## STUDIES RELATED TO THE ELECTIONS

Almost all the studies of politics in India after Independence seem to touch upon the elections. Of course, all studies cannot be reviewed. However, in this section, some characteristic studies that analyse Indian politics on the basis of electoral data will be examined.

The first category of studies is closely linked with election studies and concerns social mobilization. Elections are the most important channel through which a social group can project their representative or interests to higher political stages. There are several comprehensive studies that have accumulated data related to the social origins of legislators. These include research by Jaffrelot (2003) and Jayal (2006). These studies show what kinds of people come out in the legislatures and from which party. The rise of the lower and middle stratum of castes and classes has always been a significant factor in major political change. The transformation of the social stratum in the legislature may be good indicator of such change. On the basis of compiled information, Jaffrelot characterised the rise of the lower castes of North India as a kind of late "Sanskritisation".

In the rise of the lower castes or strata, the Indian election system has a special channel in the form of a reservation of seats for weaker sections, that is, SCs and STs. All levels of elections including Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, Panchayats, and municipalities, have reserved seats according to the percentage of the population of these groups. Further, some States have reservations for OBCs, and in the Panchayat and municipality level elections, seats are reserved for women as well. The voices of weaker sections have been expected to come out into public space through the

reservation systems.

The reservation system has given greater opportunity to the SCs and STs populations. They have actually occupied the reserved seats but have not gone beyond the reserved seats. It is still rare for the SCs/STs candidates to be elected to general seats. It is also said that legislators from reserved seats tend to be relatively passive, playing a limited role in the legislatures, debates, or committees.[26] It may also be true that reserved seats and the struggle to take the positions in them have precipitated political competition among people in corresponding strata, and this has resulted in a higher political consciousness among these groups. Such a process seems to be especially important in the case of STs. These points are discussed in the collection of papers edited by Lama-Rewal (2005). Concerning the degree of political passivity in terms of turnout of SCs and STs, analysis made by McMillan (2005), based on the CSDS data, shows a distinct tendency for lower turnout among STs in the early period. It also shows the importance of reserved seats that are likely to change voting behaviours of the people in comparison with the general seats.

Other social strata, which draw attention, are OBCs and women. The reservation for OBCs in admission to central services and public undertakings under the central government started in 1993. But there is no reservation for OBCs in the election of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. At the Panchayat or municipality level, many States have reserved seats for OBCs. Thus, there is no study of the reservation of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for OBCs simply because there is no reservation for them. Institutions of reservation for women are in the Panchayat and municipality levels but not in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. In a conservative society like India, political awakening of women is an important issue for social modernization. As the study by Shukla (1988) reveals, in many cases women are most likely to follow the male member of the family. Education seems to make women behave more independently. Education is the one of the most important factors for establishing self-reliance among women. But there is the idea that in order to accelerate the political awakening among women, there should be a special institute for female political participation, that is, a reservation for women. At present, the debate is going on in the Parliament as to how to implement a reservation system for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

Another category of studies involves the investigation of the relation between elections and conflict or violence. As mentioned, elections of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies are considered to be pacesetters, not only for electoral politics but also India's overall political process. There is some evidence that electoral politics precipitate violence and conflict. The most conspicuous example is communal violence. According to Varshney (2002), Hindu-Muslim violence is primarily an urban phenomenon, and within urban India too, Hindu-Muslim riots are for the most part, locally concentrated. He insists that the structure of civil society, or the pattern of the network of social association, is very important in determining whether a small communal conflict is limited to a small circle or spread extensively and rapidly. If the social association of the people is structured with an *intra*-ethnic line, that is, if ethnic groups are highly segregated, the possibility of extensive spread ofcommunal violence will be high. If, on the contrary, the *inter*-ethnic linkage is strong, the possibility will be much lower. He argues that the key determinant for peace is *inter-communal* civic life, not civic life perse.

Whether or not the scale of communal violence is related to the structure of civil society, there seems to be a certain relation between electoral mobilisation of religious sentiment by Hindu nationalist parties and the incidence of communal violence, and this appears to create a synchronization of election and communal violence to some extent. According to Wilkinson (2004), there is statistical evidence for a correlation between electoral incentives and communal

riots, and he recognises a pivotal role for the leadership of State government in controlling such communal riots.

Finally, elections as pacesetters may have periodical influence in other areas. One of the most relevant may be economic policy. Elections, which reveal the cumulative preference of people, may affect economic policy. Thus, there can be an election-budget cycle in India also. Lalvani (1999) found the political budget cycle in the government's budget formation, namely, in allocation of subsidies, developmental expenditures on capital account, and other such matters. However, in view of his study, economic variables beyond those based on the budget do not seem to easily follow the political budget cycle model.

## CONCLUSIONS

One can regret that studies of Indian elections, by all disciplines, tend to focus exclusively on the vote, which certainly is a climactic moment of the electoral process, but by no means the only interesting one.[25] Indeed a recent attempt by the CSDS team to understand participation beyond voting, in order to qualify the 'second democratic upsurge' (Yadav 2000) through a state wise analysis of the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, suggests that a broader definition of the electoral process might significantly contribute to solving the 'puzzle of Indian. They conclude that 'comparison across social sections shows that a broader entry of the underprivileged into the political arena is much more limited, even today, than the entry of the more privileged social sections' (Palshikar & Kumar 2004: 5414). The complementarities of different approaches are here glaring: ethnographic work is much needed to understand the implications of the fact that 'over the years there is a steady increase in the number of people who participated in election campaign activity' (Palshikar & Kumar 2004: 5415).

As studies of aggregate data reveal, in spite of the decreasing importance of the effect of urbanisation, the level of electoral participation has been increasing with socio-economic development. Such a pattern of increase is in line with the particular socio-political situation of each State. Some studies based on the survey of individuals show the basic faith of the electorate in the election system. Thus, the increasing electorate reflects confidence in electoral politics. It can be said that, though there are several defects, the electorate has fundamental faith in the electoral system. It is important that such fundamental faith in the core of the democratic regime, namely the election system, has been maintained for five decades, despite several political crises.

As the popularity of the once dominant Congress party has gradually decreased, the peculiar pattern of party preference of each State in line with the particular socio-political situation, especially castes, religions, backwardness, and others, has come to the surface. As a result, there has been a clear differentiation of the party system since the 1980's, and the era of multi-party systems and coalition governments has come. Many parties have grown based on particular ethnic groups such as castes and religion. But such increase and strengthening of regional parties based on some particular ethnic group has not necessarily exposed the problem of national integration because of the aforementioned basic faith in the democratic regime.

Many ethnicity-based parties are also likely to be patronage-based parties. In a very heterogeneous country like India, a party may be based on some specific ethnic groups, but it also must articulate and integrate other ethnicities in order to grow. In order to articulate and integrate other ethnicities, one effective strategy is to take moderate policy and distribute patronage or interests to other ethnic groups. Conversely, if an ethnicity-based party takes a radical and disintegrative policy with no patronage to be distributed, it cannot attract the support of other ethnicities.

Thus, the electoral process in a heterogeneous country has two effects on the party system: (1) differentiation on the basis of a particular ethnic as well as a socio-economic situation and (2) an integrative effect. These two effects interact with each other at the State level, and this leads to the fluctuating but basically stable party system in the State.

Finally, I would like to mention a few agendas of the future election studies.

In view of the quantity and quality of election studies in India, it may be said that relative to other developing countries, India is advancing. But compared to studies in developed countries, there is still much to be done. A systematic accumulation of data for individual voting behaviours seems to be repository for studies of voting behaviours. However, the raw data are not open to all scholars, and the framework of questionnaires is not, of course, perfect.

India necessary. CSDS has been conducting surveys continuously, and this may be a rich has a nearly complete aggregate data set in terms of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies elections. Many scholars have successfully used the Lok Sabha data, basically because the sample size is less and therefore manageable. Data of the State Legislative Assemblies elections have not yet been used to their fullest extent. There is a possibility that a study based on the data of the State Legislative Assemblies elections may give more sophisticated and accurate estimations of voting behaviours because the size of the unit of data is much smaller than that of the Lok Sabha constituency data, and correspondence between the election data and data of socio-economic attributes is thus much clearer.

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