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REVIEW ARTICLE

WOMEN VOTERS IN INDIAN POLITICS: CASE OF UP ELECTIONS, 2022

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ABSTRACT

Political process is integral to any country and especially when we discuss about the country which constitute largest world population, India, it becomes imperative to address the issues like political participation of women in Indian Politics. Women constitute half of the country's population and still it is noted that their political participation is not at par with men, rather women participation in Indian Politics is low key. The right to equality in voting is a basic human right in liberal democracy. Women enjoy this right to equality in voting, and by casting a vote they make a formal expression of their individual choice of political parties, representatives or of broad policies. However, with the increasing awareness among women regarding their rights and representation, Women voters are emerging as the decisive voice, the classic case of which could be seen in UP General Elections of 2022. The paper pointedly looks at political empowerment of women by exercising their right to vote. The paper also highlights the significance of voting for women and the various factors that influence women to vote with special emphasis on UP Assembly Elections of 2022.

INTRODUCTION

Political process is integral to any country and especially when we discuss about the country which constitute largest world population, India, it becomes imperative to address the issues like political participation of women in Indian Politics. The term Political participation has a wide connotation which doesn't only mean Women representation as a political leader, but also women voters exercising their right to vote, women who are aware citizens of the country participating in the decision-making process and political consciousness. Women constitute half the country's population and still it is noted that their political participation is not at par with men, rather women participation in Indian Politics is low key. Women participation is essential for the overall development however gender equality in Indian politics have come under scrutiny. Politics is considered as a predominated male sphere and it is unfortunate that women are underrepresented in Indian Politics. Constitution ensured legal equality to women and there have been several initiatives to ensure the political participation of women through decentralisation of power and right to vote. However, with the increasing awareness among women regarding their rights and representation, Women voters are emerging as the decisive voice, the classic case of which could be seen in UP General Elections of 2022. The right to equality in voting is a basic human right in liberal democracy. Women enjoy this right to equality in voting and by casting a vote they make a formal expression of their individual choice of political parties,

Historically, Women's engagement in electoral politics has remained less than that of men but the visible transformation can be observed via election data of Uttar Pradesh 2022 elections. The very fact that women voter's turnout in UP elections has been remarkable, it reflects how women are consentingly exercising their constitutional right of adult suffrage across the fourth largest state in India itself is the illustration to the rise of empowerment of women to secure their rights in the country where politics is considered to be an essentially male sphere. On What Basis Women Vote? Women in India are casting their votes more than ever before in great number. Active participation of women in exercising their Adult Franchise is remarkable in a patriarchal and conservative society. There are several factors that are encouraging women voters acting in the combination of push and pull. The women are becoming more aware of their rights and choose to vote but at the same time institutions in India are encouraging women to go to the polls. Women in India are gaining more grounds than being homemakers. They are educationally and economically empowered which acts as a plus factor for women to be aware of the political mood in the country. The women voters have increased at an unprecedented number in UP Assembly elections 2022 which show that women are keenly interested in taking part in political decisions and who govern them. Perceptions like women lack rationality for politics or that women are not meant for political sphere are not traditionally Indian point of views. These perceptions existed in Ancient Greek Societies and its traces can be seen even today. Similarly, is the case in India, where

speaking and like factors has been male dominated conglomerate for decades. Since men have always been in the forefront controlling and dominating active politics in the country, large number of women voter turnout mark a significant impact. As male voters have always turned out in great deal, it is not surprising that mainstream political parties and institutions have never seen women as a vital human resource for political achievements. Since women have been less politically engaged, the issue that concerns them like public safety, education, employment, health care and sanitation have often taken backseat. However, since Indian women become more politically mobilized, the manner of campaigning and party policies are also changing. Interestingly, women are voting differently as compared to men in these patriarchal settings. The increased penetration of internet in the contemporary age have acted as a boon for women as it has enabled them to interact and explore various dimensions which were unknown to them via various Social Media platforms. This has not only exposed women to socio-cultural or economic dimensions but have also shaped their political opinion which was earlier preserved to male member of the family. This constitute strong basis which have led to the increase in women's political participation through which women are voting independently and do not consult their husband, families or community to which they belong. Active political decision making by women voters have led political parties to promise special welfare measures related to women's education, employment, health & sanitation and safety.

Significance of Voting for Women Historically, in the Indian political system, women have never been addressed as a separate interest group, the instances of which could be seen with the inability to implement 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendment Act until 1992 and 1993 respectively and failure to pass Women's Reservation Bill. India, being most populous democracy in the World, have strong political sentiments in the country. However, in the past 75 years India have had only one female President and one female Prime Minister. This depicts the lack of sternness among political parties and leaders in taking into consideration the need of women's electoral participation. The recent trends regarding the participation of women in politics in India reveal an upsurge in women voters and UP election result of 2022 serves a strong testimony for the same where women voters outnumbered male voters. However, the scenario has not always been the same. Women were either not considered as important influencing factor in political process, or they were just viewed as vote bank for the political parties as their issues were never the centre to the parties' manifesto or were invariably seen as an extension of their male kin or of the communities they belonged to. Political rights and representation are significant indicator of equality and freedom. It ensures gender equality in sharing of political power and thereby empowers women within the democratic framework of electoral politics. The current Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) led-NDA Government at the centre has been in power since 2014 and have mobilised large number of women voters. During 2014 General Elections it included women's safety as a key campaign agenda. Since then, the central government have announced several welfare programmes for women such as

Pradhan Mantri UjjwalaYojna: The objective of the scheme is to make clean cooking fuel such as LPG available to rural and deprived household to replace it with traditional cooking fuels such as firewood, coal, cow-dung cake etc. as such traditional cooking fuels had detrimental impact on the health of rural women.

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao: The Indian Government in 2015 introduced Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme to address concerns of gender discrimination and women empowerment in the country. The scheme aims to educate citizens against gender bias and improve efficacy of welfare services for girls.

Ujjawala Scheme: The objective of the scheme is to prevent trafficking and for Rescue, Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Repatriation of victims of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. Apart from the above-mentioned scheme there are several other schemes like One Stop Centre and Universalization of

Women Helplines, SwadharGreh Scheme, Working Women Hostel, Mahila Shakti Kendra, Pradhan Mantri Matru Yojana. Through these schemes the BJP government have successfully mobilised large number of women voters and promises more women centric welfare schemes. Apart from the centrally sponsored schemes, the Governments at the State Level are also taking initiative towards women voters. As the CM of Odisha, Naveen Patnaik announced that the 33 per cent of the seats to be reserved for women in Legislative Assembly, thereby showing their commitment that Odisha is the land where women are truly empowered and truly involved in nation building. However, it is important to note that an increase in the number of women voters and women candidate doesn't mean reduced gender inequality or improved gender indicator. There is a large proportion of "Missing Women Voters"- women who are not on the electoral roll. However, with the growth of nation, issues related to women surface and catch political attention. This represents the ongoing transformation in democratic politics. It can be correctly pointed out that apart from the welfare schemes that have attracted women voter, women voters have ignored the issues like caste, class and social lines to vote for the party which has worked for them. Women voters are as conscious and aware as male voters regarding socio-economic issues. However, since women have been under represented in Indian politics for a very long period of time, the "women" in India have ended up being treated as a separate vote bank and it is for the same reasons that there are detrimental factors that constitute significant basis for influencing women voters in India. Women Empowerment Schemes in Uttar Pradesh. Since the paper pointedly focus on the outstanding participation by the women voters in the 2022 UP election, it is important to note the initiatives taken by BJP government for women empowerment in state of Uttar Pradesh which added to their second victory after 2017. The BJP led Government in UP headed by the CM Yogi Adityanath, have taken several initiatives like:

Mission Shakti: Under the program the government aims at promoting security, dignity and empowerment of women by forming self help groups, women pension scheme, safe city project, posting of women police personnel, construction of pink toilets, special recruitment for women battalions of Provincial Armed Constabulary and setting up of health clubs in Women's college.

Mukhyamantri Kanya SumanlaYojna: The scheme aims to end inequality and discrimination by against females. The scheme provides monetary benefits for the welfare of girl child as the parents can get cash up to 15,000 for up to two girl children in the family. It ensures social security to the girl child along with her development. It also aims to prevent social vices like female feticide and child marriage.

Nirbhaya-Ek Pahal Program: The program aims to connect as many as 75,000 women with state bank. They will be able to get loans at cheaper interest rates and avail benefits of state subsidies.

Grant Scheme for marriage of daughters of poor people: Parents whose annual income from all sources in urban areas is less than Rs 56,460/- and Rs 46,080/- in rural areas and minimum age of the bride is 18 and groom is 21, they will be provided with Marriage Grant of Rs 20,000/- through transfer in bank accounts.

UP Assembly Elections, 2022: The recent trends in Indian Politics have marked a departure from the traditional political setting in the country. The 1951 elections proved to be the biggest test for Indian Democracy in which India succeeded remarkably by establishing Democracy in a poor and illiterate country, but women voters were negligible. What have come to notice now is number of women voter turnout is gradually increasing. Women voter turnout is larger in number than ever before. The gap between men and women who exercised their Right to Vote was about 10 per cent in 1960-70's. However, the difference in the gender turnout has reduced over the time especially after 2014 General Elections to 1.8 per cent. The UP-Assembly Elections of 2022 wherein BJP scored victory for the second time after 2017 Assembly elections is historic as no other

government managed to achieve this in past 37 years. The victory is credited to large number of women voters who voted for the government working for their empowerment, fulfilling its promises and maintaining law and order in the state. BJP-led government confirmed its return to power by bagging 255 seats in the 403-member Assembly Elections. Participation of women as voters in Uttar Pradesh has increased noticeably- from 44.2 per cent in 1991 to 63.4 per cent in 2017 to 62.2 per cent in 2022. Only 59.6 per cent of men on the electoral rolls voted. However, there are only 868 women per 1,000 men on electoral rolls in UP. This is an improvement from 857 per 1,000 before the revision of the rolls with 28.86 lakh women getting their names registered as compared to 23.92 lakh men between November & December 2021. Such rise in the last three decades is an indication of rising political consciousness as well as growing interest in elections. It also points out that women are getting politically mobilised and are emerging as significant vote bloc.

CONCLUSION

However, ironically, the changing voter turnout dynamics aren't reflecting in women entering politics and being awarded tickets to fight elections to assemblies and Parliament. The political arena still remains a largely male-dominated sphere. The increase in women voter turnout indicates that women are politically aware of their rights and responsibilities as an active citizen of the country. Women voters are as conscious and aware as male voters regarding socio-economic issues. However, since women have been under represented in Indian politics for a very long period of time, the "women" in India have ended up being treated as a separate vote bank and it is for the same reasons that there are detrimental factors that constitute significant basis for influencing women voters in India.

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