



Voting behaviour of differently abled people in India.

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Introduction: Disabled persons are those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments and these impairments may hinder their full and effective participation in society on equal basis with others. Disabilities' is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions (Agarwal, 2010). The 2001 Indian Census states that “defining and measuring disability is a complex issue and it is not easy to communicate these concepts during the census process, in which only a limited amount of questioning time is possible with a household for obtaining detailed information on every individual”. The most common definition and classification of disability within the Indian government was determined with the enactment of the 1995 Act, and states that a person is considered to have a disability if they suffer ‘from not less than 40 % of any disability as certified by a medical authority’. Voting behaviour refers to the patterns and factors that influence how individuals make decisions when casting their votes in elections. It is a complex and multifaceted subject that political scientists and sociologists study to understand why people vote the way they do. “Voting” is one of the most commonly used terms in contemporary age of democratic politics (Sharma,2012). The ever-increasing popularity of democratic theory and practice has even made this term a household name. In democratic systems, and their number is quite large and even increasing, each adult citizen uses ‘voting’ as a means for expressing his approval or disapproval of governmental decisions, policies and programmes of various political parties and the qualities of the candidates who are engaged in the struggle to get the status of being the representatives of the people (Hazarika,2015). The voting rights of disabled persons, like all citizens, are protected and enshrined in democratic societies to ensure equal participation in the electoral process. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

specifically addresses the rights of persons with disabilities, including their right to participate in political and public life (Ghai,2015). In India, the voting rights of disabled persons are protected and promoted to ensure their equal participation in the democratic process. Persons with disabilities are considered as one of the most marginalised groups in the whole world. They have the same kind of needs like non-disabled ones in terms of health screening, immunisation etc. The rights of disabled individuals in the context of voting are addressed through various legal and policy measures. In this article it is aimed to highlight the various aspects of voting behaviour of differently able people in India.

Discussion: In 2001 there were 22 million people living with a disability in India, corresponding to 2.1 % of the population or 21 disability cases per 1000(Jefferey,2008). In India, people with disabilities are commonly referred to as "differently-abled" or "persons with disabilities" (PWDs). The term "differently-abled" is used to emphasize the unique abilities and potential of individuals with disabilities rather than focusing solely on their limitations. India has legislation to protect the rights of differently-abled individuals. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD Act), passed in 2016, replaced the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. The RPWD Act aims to ensure equal opportunities, protection of rights, and full participation for PWDs across various aspects of life. Despite legal provisions, differently-abled individuals in India face several challenges:

Accessibility: Many public spaces, transportation systems, and buildings lack adequate accessibility features, making it difficult for differently-abled people to move around freely.

Education: Access to quality education is limited for many differently-abled individuals, particularly in rural areas. Special education infrastructure and resources are often insufficient.

Employment: Differently-abled people encounter barriers to employment, and there is a lack of inclusive opportunities in the job market.

Stigma and Discrimination: Social stigma and discrimination can isolate differently-abled individuals and restrict their full participation in society.

Healthcare: Access to appropriate healthcare and rehabilitation services can be challenging for PWDs, particularly in remote areas.

Poverty: Differently-abled individuals are more likely to experience poverty due to limited educational and employment opportunities.

In India, disabled individuals have specific political rights and protections to ensure their participation in the democratic process. The rights of disabled persons in the political sphere are safeguarded under various laws and initiatives. The RPWD Act is a comprehensive legislation that replaced the previous Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. This act aims to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities, including their political rights. It recognizes seven categories of disabilities and addresses issues related to education, employment, accessibility, healthcare, and social welfare (Narahariseti,2016). Disabled individuals in India have the right to vote in all elections, be it for the Lok Sabha (House of the People), State Legislative Assemblies, or local government bodies. The Election Commission of India (ECI) takes measures to ensure that polling stations are accessible to disabled voters. This includes providing facilities like ramps, wheelchair-friendly entrances, and other necessary

accommodations. To ensure representation and political participation, the Indian Constitution reserves seats for disabled individuals in local government bodies (Panchayats and Municipalities). This reservation varies from state to state and is intended to enhance the political representation of disabled persons at the grassroots level. During elections, disabled individuals can request assistance from a companion to help them cast their votes. Polling officials are also trained to provide support to disabled voters if needed. Disabled individuals and those who are unable to visit polling stations due to physical disabilities can opt for the postal ballot facility. This allows them to cast their votes by mail. The Accessible India Campaign, launched in 2015, aims to enhance the accessibility of public spaces and transportation for persons with disabilities, including polling stations, to ensure their seamless participation in the electoral process. While there can be considerable diversity among disabled voters, some common themes emerge in understanding their voting behaviour. Here are key factors that can influence how disabled people vote:

1. **Accessibility of Polling Stations:** The accessibility of polling stations is a critical factor for disabled voters. If polling stations are not physically accessible or lack necessary accommodations, it can deter disabled individuals from voting (Mehotra, 2017).
2. **Disability-Specific Issues:** Disabled voters may prioritize disability-specific issues such as accessibility, healthcare, social welfare, and employment opportunities when choosing candidates and parties.
3. **Empathy and Understanding:** Disabled individuals may be more inclined to support candidates and parties that demonstrate empathy and understanding towards disability-related challenges and advocate for disability rights.
4. **Social and Family Influence:** As with the general population, disabled individuals can be influenced by the voting preferences of their family, friends, and social circles.
5. **Political Awareness and Information:** The level of political awareness and access to information about candidates, parties, and political issues can shape the voting behaviour of disabled people. Greater awareness can lead to more informed voting decisions.
6. **Intersectionality:** Disabled voters belong to diverse demographic groups, and their voting behaviour may be influenced by factors such as age, gender, race, and socio-economic status, in addition to their disability.
7. **Involvement in Disability Advocacy Groups:** Disabled individuals who are actively involved in disability advocacy groups or organizations may be more politically engaged and motivated to vote based on disability-related issues.
8. **Impact of Past Policies:** Disabled voters may consider the impact of past government policies and actions on disability-related matters when making their voting decisions.
9. **Political Participation and Empowerment:** Disabled individuals who have opportunities for political participation and feel empowered to make a difference may be more motivated to engage in voting behaviour.
10. **Media Representation:** The portrayal of disabled individuals in the media and political campaigns can influence their perceptions and voting behaviour.
11. **Candidate's Inclusivity and Commitment:** Disabled voters may be more likely to support candidates who prioritize inclusivity, advocate for disability rights, and propose policies to address disability-related challenges.

Conclusion: People should accept them as equal and not someone who need to be pitied. They should be given equal opportunities to come forward in every sphere of their life. Specially abled people don't want to be treated as different, they want to be treated as equal always. We must interact with them and make them feel normal because disability results as an interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers and hinders their full and effective participation in the entire society on an equal basis with others. In this paper it is try to analyse about the socio- political aspects of voting behaviour of the disabled people in our country and how they face hindrance in terms of voting and political participation as an active citizen of the country. Along with it is also try to highlights some measures to solve the problem. This research paper can open the path to another research scholar to study about various related aspects regarding this issue such as role of govt. And NGOs in terms of their upliftment, how political party and their agenda takes chance of their disable condition and persuade to vote by using propaganda and political agenda, how it impacts the overall political scenario of a nation and so on (Thriveni,2022). While there have been efforts to ensure political rights and participation for disabled individuals in India, challenges related to accessibility and awareness persist. More work is needed to create an inclusive environment where disabled individuals can exercise their political rights fully and without hindrance. The government, civil society, and various stakeholders continue to work toward the goal of greater inclusion and representation of disabled persons in the political landscape. It's important to note that disabled people, like any other group, are not a monolithic voting bloc, and their voting behaviour can vary significantly depending on individual experiences, values, and priorities. Creating an inclusive and accessible political environment, addressing disability-specific issues, and raising awareness about disability rights are crucial steps to encourage disabled individuals' political participation and empower them to exercise their right to vote effectively.

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