

BOOK REVIEWS

Lancy Lobo and Jayesh Shah, *How People Vote: Civic Literacy and Political Participation*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2019, pp. xx + 244, Hardcover. Rs. 995/-.

The recent global democratic functioning is quite disappointing. However, the electoral contests between liberal and illiberal camps are hard fought through ballot and not by the bullet. Often doubts have surfaced about the quality of the electoral process as not being free and fair. But the ballot continues to remain a strong tool of producing people's mandate and acquiring legitimacy for governance. The contestants indulge in all kinds of tricks to get elected. Media control and content manipulation has emerged as a huge challenge to the survival of free, fair, transparent, competitive and accountable democracy.

In this context, the question of how people vote acquires enormous analytical primacy. Strengthening electoral democracy is the major concern of this book. This study has selected David Held's participatory and representative model of democracy. The authors argue that the Indian society has yet to develop and deepen supportive political culture for sustaining this model of democracy.

The book opens with an excellent summary of global landscape of democracy. It begins with Pippa Norris's well researched findings of European and American democracies which are showing signs of reversal and back-sliding. Distrust of politicians and political parties are pushing voters to search alternative paths of political engagements. Retreating globalization, forced transnational migration, climate change, ethno-religious conflicts, exclusionist tendencies and glaring socio-economic inequalities have seriously impacted global democratic landscape. Thus, democracy today appears threatened. But on the other hand, we also witness vigorous defending of core democratic values.

For assessing the functioning of Indian democracy, the authors have designed a conceptual framework of procedural democracy and substantive democracy. The former is about political parties, election commission, periodically held elections, campaigning and voting which install a democratically elected government. The latter deals with making major policy decisions on redistributive justice, human capabilities and entitlements.

On procedural democracy, the Indian performance is outstanding and exemplary. The percentage of voter turnout and vote shares of contesting political parties indicate the extent and levels of citizen's participation. This study has used the survey method to measure political participation, civic

awareness and trust in political institutions of democracy. Knowledge, Attitude and Perception (KAP) of selected respondents on relevant issues were solicited and analyzed. It tried to know voter-citizens' knowledge and the role of the state regarding issues of rights, social justice, justice system, welfare and its response to globalization.

Authors have stated that election studies in India have mostly remained confined to parliamentary and state assemblies. The tertiary level of local democracy in villages and cities of Gujarat has remained somewhat neglected. This book is an appreciable initiative to study local democracy in Gujarat, especially from the standard social science approaches. The conceptual framework of the study has hinged on two major concepts of 'political participation' and 'civic literacy'. The authors have assumed that higher the levels of civic literacy, better the extent of political participation by citizens in political activities.

A sub-section titled 'Election Studies in India' is simply commendable. The authors have discussed four interesting aspects regarding: the history of methodology of election studies in India; the pioneering centres, psephologists, scholars and their major studies; identifying theoretical and methodological short-comings; and, the inadvertent neglect of local poll studies. From this extensive and comprehensive review exercise, the authors have attempted to find out the level of civil literacy and political participation in the urban, semi-urban and rural Vadodara and ways to measure civic literacy and political participation, the variables and indicators that influence civic literacy and political participation of citizens and whether civic literacy and political participation are co-related, the extent to which individuals are voting as individuals transcending caste and creed and the extent to which Indian democracy has matured as far as electoral behaviour is concerned.

In sum, this study has examined specific impact of civic literacy on political participation. It has tried to test the hypothesis that, "the higher the level of civic literacy, the more the citizens take part in politics (p. 25). Conversely, the citizens with low levels of civic literacy are alienated from the political and democratic ideals. This study has argued that most important factor for increasing political participation of citizens is civic literacy. This strengthens democracy and makes it vibrant. Hence, it tested whether civic literacy would have a significant bearing on political participation of citizens.

The entire study included (i) booth wise analysis of votes polled, (ii) ethnography and (iii) civic literacy and political participation study of 2010 local body polls; 2012 Gujarat Assembly poll; 2014 Lok Sabha poll and 2015-16 local body polls in Gujarat.

The multi-locational setting of the study included (i) the urban setting from five election wards of Vadodara East and three election wards of Vadodara West; (ii) the semi-urban area of Dabhoi town, and (iii) the rural areas of Jabugam village in Jetpur-Pavi taluka of Vadodara District.

The study has reported insightful findings on people's perception about democracy and the influence of caste, religion, political or community leaders, ideology, family, education, age and income on voting preferences. Influence of peer and family pressure is also analyzed. An interesting narrative is on whether people vote as duty, for recognition and status or as a valuable democratic right.

This study raises the hope that civic literacy and political participation of the voters will strengthen Indian Democracy in the long run. However, the closing words leave us with a worry. The authors have stated that the trend of 'religion-based majoritarianism is likely to be used more intensely in the upcoming state and parliamentary elections' (p. 208). Countrywide unleashed processes of majoritarian homogenization and mobilization for electoral support is a cause for worry. This has put Indian electorate and Indian Democracy to a litmus test.

The authors have produced an outstanding piece of a well-researched work on an area of Indian Democracy which had remained somewhat neglected.

Priyavadan M. Patel

Retired Professor MSU-BARODA