

Practicing Psephology In Changing Indian Political Culture

Ravi Rameshchandra. Shukla (Ph. D)*

ABSTRACT

Why people behave, the way they do? The term Psephology has emerged from Greek city states where two words, psephos meaning pebble and logy denoting a field of study were used (Indian today Magazine, July 2012). The aim of this research paper is to develop the theory and practice of psephology at both applied and academic levels. It will also inspire the scholars and practicers who chart the mainstream of electoral research, surveys, exit polls and strategies in the future. It has also been observed that the political culture of any country/group/community/individual might fundamentally differ from other one and another. There is no country in the world to-day which can boast of single uniform political culture. Almond and Verba have listed four ideal types of political culture namely, Parochial, Subject, Participant and Political Sub-culture.

*The modern history of academic voting research or psephology began in 1940 at Columbia University, where a team of social scientists assembled by **Paul Lazarsfeld** pioneered the application of survey research to the study of electoral behavior. Foreign scholars like David Elkins (1977), Myron Weiner (1965), Paul Brass (1993) and others have taken keen interest in studying electoral politics in India. B.D. Graham finds that Indian election studies have two kinds of theories:- (a) Enlightenment theory (b) Transactional theory (Graham:1975). This is measured through, Campaigning finance information and other related data, Public opinion poll, Election Campaign War Room management, Election Literature development and creation.*

Keywords: Psephology, Political Culture, Voting Bahviour, War Room, Election Management,

Practicing Psephology In Changing Indian Political Culture

I. What is Psephology?

Why people behave, the way they do? This has been the major area of concern for the behavioural or Empirical approach to the study of Politics. The term Psephology has emerged from Greek city states where two words, *psephos* meaning pebble and *logy* denoting a field of study were used (Indian today Magazine, July 2012). The *psephos* (*pebbles*) were used by the Greek Citizens as a form of ballots; psephology thus refers to the scientific study of elections and voting behavior. In recent times this term was used for the first time in 1952 by **William Francis Ross "Frank" Hardie (WFR Hardie)** a British classicist, philosopher and academic. He described it as the science of analysis of elections. People who practice psephology are called psephologist. The aim of this research paper is to develop the theory and practice of psephology at both applied and academic levels. There are of course, many relevant issues, work and expertise left to be covered. This is inevitable, given limitations of space and of my own expertise.

It is the need of time that, the academia and practitioners of politics should give a thought to evolve psephology as an independent discipline of study, research and practice. Today political science as a job offering subject is not taken enthusiastically by the students. Similar situation arose during 19th century. 131 years ago, in 1887 Professor Woodrow Wilson germinated the allied discipline of 'Public Administration' through his article entitled, '**The Study of Public Administration**' (Wilson: 1887). After publication of this article a great debate took place in amongst political scientists, particularly in America. After wards we all know that, public administration emerged as an independent discipline of study, research and practice. Likewise, this allied discipline of Psephology needs a serious academic, research and practice level debate. It will not just save the subject of political science, but make it more relevant.

It is expected that the range of scholarships and methods touched upon in this research work, will be catalyst in enriching the sense of the understanding and application amongst the practicers, scholars and researchers of electoral politics, voting behaviour and political culture. It will also inspire the scholars and practicers who chart the mainstream of electoral research, surveys, exit polls and strategies in the future.

The modern history of academic voting research or psephology began in 1940 at Columbia University, where a team of social scientists assembled by **Paul Lazarsfeld** pioneered the application of survey research to the study of electoral behavior. The results of the 1940 Columbia study were published in **The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign** (1944). A second panel study conducted by the Columbia

team in Elmira, New York, in 1948 provided the basis for an even more influential book, **Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign** (Berelson, et al: 1954). Together, these two volumes defined a set of questions and research methods that have had a variety of profound effects on subsequent work in the field. The most ambitious attempt by contemporary scholars to integrate analyses of public opinion, electoral behavior, party politics, and public policy is **Robert Erikson, Michael MacKuen, and James Stimson's (2002)** published '**The Macro Polity**'.

Scholarly interest in the study of elections in India almost accompanied the first exercise of Universal Adult Franchise in 1952. Foreign scholars like David Elkins (1977), Myron Weiner (1965), Paul Brass (1993) and others have taken keen interest in studying electoral politics in India. Among the Indian scholars the prominent are Rajni Kothari (1971), V.M. Sirsikar (1973), Iqbal Narain (1973), Bangendu Ganguly and Mira Ganguly (1975), Basheeruddin Ahmed (1978), B. B. Jena (1989), Subrata Mitra (1999), Yogendra Yadav (1999;2004), Nirija Gopal Jayal (2006), Sanjay Kumar (2013). It is a branch of political science, which deals with the study and scientific analysis of elections. It uses historical precincts supporting data, opinion polls, campaigning strategy, finance information, analysis of statistical data etc.

This scientific analysis of political elections is based on statistics, which requires a psephologist to have a good understanding of the demographic patterns of the region, caste dynamics, pressure groups and important issues in the preceding elections coupled with a sharp political sense. The scope of such professionals encompasses analysis of aspects like trends in voting, swings in votes; number of votes polled or percentage of total votes polled translating into the number of seats in the government. Based on this data, a psephologist infers the outcome of the public opinion manifested in the form of elections.

Thus, the role of a psephologist is very important and constructive for a vibrant democratic country like India, where elections are being held in some state or the other with alarming regularity. Thus, the demand of psephologists have increased suddenly and this is not a seasonal profession as they are usually contracted by one media group or the other to write relevant columns and articles pertaining to political science or sociology.

Studying elections in the largest democracy in the world is bound to be a challenge: given the size of the country and of its population, Indian national elections have been the largest electoral exercise in the world ever since the first national elections in 1952. Moreover the cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity of the Indian society, as well as the federal nature of the Indian state, make this event a particularly complex one (Tawa & Rewal, 2009: 1).

Election studies 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. This sub-genre, being relatively more visible than other studies of representative democracy, has specific implications, in the academic but also in the political arena, which will be the focus of this critical review. This paper will argue that election studies are really in between science and politics, and that it is important, therefore, to contextualize them. The scholars who have enriched this area are Narain (1978), Brass (1985), and Kondo (2007) etc.

Surveys and data analysis are the main tools of psephology. Through these surveys we understand and interpret the voting behavior of the Indian electorates. Thus the changing voting patterns warrant the academia and psephologists to study the basic framework of India's democratic regime. It is essential to understand the dynamics and factors inspiring the choice of the voters on the polling day. The study and understanding of 'the likes' and is likes of the voters is known as the voting behavior. The study of voting behaviour also helps us to reflect the socio- economic and politico – ideological bases of the major political parties at National Level. Like i.e. BJP being right wing, Communists being left wing parties and Congress and others as the centrist streams in political arena. Thus affiliation and loyalty to political party is still a greatest determinant of voting behaviour and pattern in India.

After reviewing the available literature in India, Iqbal Narain et al in their book, '**Election Studies in India**' (Iqbal Narain, S.P. Verma: 1973), grouped the psephological studies in India broadly under the following heads:

- i. Macro/Micro level generic studies which were usually based on secondary sources, particularly the newspapers, though supplemented sometimes by personal interviews.
- ii. Macro-level aggregate data analysis which was done mostly by foreign/outsider scholars' inputs.
- iii. Voting behavior studies, though numerous are still to go a long way
- iv. Specific foci studies which are only few covering such topics as nomination process, campaign strategy and styles, minority votes, SC/ST voters and the like groups etc.
- v. Trade Unions, pressure groups, interest groups, socio- cultural firings, religious groups (Ravi: 2014).

B.D. Graham finds that Indian election studies have two kinds of theories:

- a. Enlightenment theory, which maintains that old barriers like caste and religions are falling down.
- b. Transactional theory, which maintains that Electorates are governed by coalition of leaders and also sub-leaders than by political Parties (Graham: 1975).

The Psephology as a theory and practice, like public administration has the ability to strengthen the popular democracy and its policy making institutions. Prof. Imtiyaz Ahmad noted that, '*While their predictive capability is limited, they may still provide a cumulative, long-term view of the processes of politicization of the electorate and of the development of India's political system*' (Imtiyaz Ahmad: 1977). A psephologist requires excellent skills in knowledge of demography, skills to operate and analysis of statistical data, good knowledge of theory and practice of politics and political environment. Above all a successful psephologist should have a quick wit to read between the lines and words.

II. Theoretical and empirical importance of Psephology

Psephology is a science and art that on the one hand can actually bring the elections centered to agenda of development, qualities and efficiency of leaders, performance index of parties, on the other it can help us to know the opinion of voters, their needs, issues etc. Thus the study of psephology enormously helps to understand public issues, demands, socio- economic dynamics and major policy outcomes through empirical surveys and statistical analysis. It can give direction to the parties and candidates in making of their electoral manifestos. The psephological studies and its reports also help the parties in framing of their election strategy to win the elections. For common voters psephological reports help them to understand the state of affairs and judge the political nerve for a better decision making process. Its inferences and inputs are taken seriously by the parties, candidates, voters and Media.

The pre and post elections surveys have become very important in every election for all the take holders. The stakeholders of elections do invest huge amount in psephological studies and services. Thus it is emerging to offer a range of jobs also. Psphological studies involve good researchers, statisticians, tech – savvy hands, project managers, finance officers etc. Therefore, it should be promoted as an independent subject of study and practice, like Public Administration. So far we are treating it just as branch of political science.

The syllabi of psephology should prominently include amongst others:

- i. Study of political theory and practice.
- ii. Study of political institutions and constitutions.
- iii. Study of electoral history at Local, Assembly and General level since 1951, Elections machinery, rules and process.
- iv. Study of caste, culture, religion, gender and their role in politics.
- v. Study of public policy and people's participation, electoral dynamics and factors.

- vi. Study of biographical details of parties and leaders.
- vii. Study of Fund raising and financial management during elections and the study of marketing, promotion and branding skills.
- viii. Study of science of campaign steering and war room management.
- ix. Study of training the Development of Human Resources for the elections.
- x. Study of Research Methodologies, Survey Techniques, Data Analysis, Statistical rules, latest software and technologies.

III. Psephology and role of Political Culture

The elections generate a lot of electoral trends. These trends are having undercurrent factors, which has a great impact on electoral trends. The trend helps us to understand voters characteristics and culture. It is known as Political Culture. '*Political Culture*' is potentially a powerful, unifying concept of political science. It was first proposed by Gabriel Almond (1956) and subsequently employed in '*The Civic Culture*' (Almond and Verba: 1965). The term promised to solve in a scientific, cross-culturally valid way the micro-macro problem: the classic problem of specifying how people affect their political system, and vice versa. They emphasized that, '*Political culture may provide us with a valuable conceptual tool by means of which we can bridge the 'micro-macro' gap in political theory*' (Almond and Powell, 1965:51-52). How does one make the transition from the study of the individual in his political context to the study of the political system as a whole? How does one relate individual interviews and responses, and case studies of individual actions, to the aggregate statistics and group behavior patterns which reflect the course of a system's total behavior? Political culture by revealing the patterns of orientations to political action helps us connect individual tendencies to system characteristics.

A. Different Kinds of Political Culture

It has also been observed that the political culture of one country/group/community/individual might fundamentally differ from other one and another. There is no country in the world to-day which can boast of single uniform political culture. Almond and Verba have listed four ideal types of political culture.

i. Parochial Political cultures:

Parochial culture as the term itself suggests that, it is exemplified by African tribal societies; citizens have low cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientation towards the political objects. In these simpler traditional societies, there are no specialized political roles and little expectation for political change (pp. 17; 20). Here, '*the individual thinks of his family's*

advantage as the only goal to pursue, or conceives of his role in the political system in family terms' (p. 120).

ii. Subject Political Cultures:

There is high cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientation towards the political system and policy outputs, but orientations towards input objects (like political parties) and the self as an active participant are minimal. Thus orientation towards the system and its outputs is channeled via a relatively detached, passive relationship on the part of the citizen (p. 17). Subject cultures are most compatible with centralized, authoritarian political structures (pp. 17, 20). Indeed, for the subject *"the law is something he obeys, not something he helps shape"* (Almond, 1965: 118).

iii. Participant Political Cultures:

In this set of political culture members of society have high cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientation to the political system, the input objects, the policy outputs, and recognize the self as an active participant in the polity. Social actors tend to be activist and mobilized (p. 18). In general, participant cultures are most compatible with democratic political structures (p. 20). Here, the citizens are expected to have *'the virtues of the subject – to obey the law, to be loyal – but he is also expected to take some part in the formation of decisions'* (Almond and Verba, 1965: 118).

iv. Political Sub-culture:

It is not necessary that all the groups in habiting a particular country may be equally advanced; some may be more advanced, while others may be less advanced. This is due to the reason that in many countries of the world there are different ethnic groups. Differences in political culture amongst them develop due to the difference in education, political training, economic and social background. Sometimes new political structure may be introduced by the elite but certain people may not be able to cope with it.

v. Electoral Culture in India:

The electoral culture in the broad sense of the term is the part of overall political culture which refers nation's faith and confidence in people's mandate, propensity in democratic way of finding solution to the various problems before the nation, the involvement of the people in electoral system as well as electoral behavior and the way of looking at election. The electoral culture generates a set of electoral trends; it encourages electoral process and motivates an electoral philosophy as a democratic way of life. India's electoral culture is based on mass oriented issues, character and issue oriented leadership as well as circumstantial compulsions (Kumar: 1990, 77).

In Indian scenario we find mix political cultures. It may exist in sub- sets i.e. parochial – subject, subject – participatory or parochial- participatory culture. Indian political culture also

reflects a mixture of sub-sets of political culture. It depends from community to community and place to place also. So without having a detailed and clear understanding of the political culture of the constituency and electorate, it is very difficult for a practicing psephologist to predict any pre – poll possibility or exit - poll prediction. However, unlike Western democracies, the voting behaviour of the Indian voters is fragile. Anything might cause a swing in no time and change the poll predictions.

IV. Understanding Voting Behaviour

Why people vote in the way they do? In order to be a successful analyst, it is necessary to have a strong grip over understanding of the patterns of the voting behaviour. Voting is a significant mode of political participation of the citizens. Therefore, it would be really helpful if the voting behaviour is kept in focus of electoral strategy. Basically, political behaviour of the citizens are influenced by membership, common values, Ideological wirings, shared equality or inequality and political conditions in once surrounding. Other major determinants of voting behaviour in India can be enlisted as under:

- i. Party Identification
- ii. Issues / Problem / Constructive work
- iii. Immediate Gains
- iv. Candidates *persona grata*
- v. Policy / Programmes / Agenda for development
- vi. Anti – incumbency wave
- vii. Charismatic leadership
- viii. Caste / Religion / Race / Language
- ix. Local elites / community leadership
- x. Ideology
- xi. Money – Mafiosi – Market
- xii. Media – Wave (including news Spinners)
- xiii. Class factor
- xiv. Marginal / individual voters

Bartels suggest that, '*a careful use of media contents turnouts to be of little use in accounting for voters choice*' (Bartels, 2008: 03). Because media contents are based upon strong brand loyalties, emanating from religion, caste, class and gender influences. Such kind of media behaviour targets likeminded voters only. Political parties through the help of media try to mould the voting bahviour of people. Therefore, a careful strategist must analyze the media contents with caution. Perception might or might not become the reality. Moreover, in India we find 'sentiment' overpowers 'reasons'. The 'faith' is preferred over 'conviction' and wishful expectations are held higher than, careful prediction of consequences.

The forces to mould the voters

a. Attitudinal Forces

- i. Towards Candidate
- ii. Relevant social group
- iii. Parties as managers of government
- iv. Domestic Issues
- v. Foreign Policy
- vi. Popular appeal, rhetoric, discourses.

In his seminal work Campbell noted that, ‘when we examine the evidence on the manner in which party attachment develops and changes during the lifetime of the individual citizens, we find a picture characterized more by stability than by change – not by rigid, immutable fixation on one party rather than the other, out by a persistent adherence and a resistance to country influence’ (Campbell et .al. 1960, 146). It will require a cross sectional survey to understand this phenomenon cross – generational.

A. Elites Forces:

Political information, engagement and ideological resuming are less widespread in the public than most elites of society. Thus different approaches are required to far canvassing with elites and commoners. Sometimes general social goals become more predominant than the general legislative and administrative economic reforms. i.e. *Ram Mandir, Hindu Rashtr, Secularism, Triple Talaq, Dalit – Adivasi issues* etc. there are no coherent patterns of belief amongst different sections of votes.

B. Rational Choice Forces:

Utility maximization developed in economics to political decision- making. Rational objective decision is largely influenced by the objective choice made by people. Especially, the voters in participant political culture have rational choice while voting.

C. Retrospective and prospective voting forces:

It refers to voting made after taking into consideration factors like the performance of a political party, an office holder and / or the administration. It presumes that people are more concerned with policy outcomes, than policy instruments. There are two types of retrospective voting. They are based on simple retrospective evaluations based mainly on direct experience with personal finance, war, civil rights and the like. It puts emphasis on traditional and identity variables. Retrospective and prospective voting as Key (1966) has suggested that, *‘The Responsible Electorate much of the rational choice work on voting behavior has placed an emphasis on retrospective evaluations. If the performance of the incumbent party pleases one, one casts a ballot in favor of the incumbent party (Key, 1966). Conversely, if one is displeased with the performance of the incumbent administration, one punishes that party by voting against it. Moreover, the retrospective model, as suggested by Key, is a tactic of reward or punishment. The voter does not take the claim of opposition party/candidate into account, while they make a decision to vote.*

Their voting is just a way of expressing approval or disapproval towards the incumbent government. Many surveys suggest that, the evaluation of economic performance of the incumbent government's policies (mainly in Lok Sabha elections). More specifically, personal financial items have difficulty in achieving statistical significance, while evaluations of a "mediated" (Fiorina, 1981) or "sociotropic" nature (Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979, 1981) consistently achieve statistical significance.

An analysis of prospective economic evaluations influence on vote choice allows us to ascertain whether voters take new information into account. Under a retrospective framework, voters look only at past events. *Either they employ an extrapolative (static) model, like that described above, or an adaptive model* (Lockerbie, 1991: 280).

D. Unidirectional Ideological Forces:

These forces measure the voters on the ideological lines, as they choose parties on that basis. The ideology plays a very important emotional booster for the voters. This can be political or non political ideology. It leaves a great degree of impact on the decisions of the voters. It is also possible that, this kind of voting behaviour might undermine basic electoral issue in the name of ideology.

Conclusion

Pephology is a very vast area of study. It is emerging as a theory that helps in making of elections strategy, understanding voter's behaviour, war room management and public policy outcomes. Although the practice of independent psephology is a difficult task because it requires a huge amount of money and resources involved in its field studies. However, it has the potential to emerge as an independent discipline of study like Public Administration. On the other hand the war room management is a challenging team work. The data and strategy acquired through psephological studies should be used by the war room team to lead a winning election campaign. This paper did not cover some of the research methodologies, strategies and theoretical aspects due to the constraints of research paper. It shall be covered in detail with the upcoming book on this topic.

References

1. Almond, Gabriel A. and Verba, Sidney (1965): '*The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*', pp. 19 & 79. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company.
2. Ahmad, Imtiaz (1977): Election Studies in India, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 12, 39, pp. 1677 & 1679-1680.
3. Aron, A., & Aron, E. N. (1997). *Statistics for the behavioral and social sciences: A brief course*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
4. Attewell, P., & Rule, J. B. (1991). Survey and other methodologies applied to IT impact research: Experiences from a comparative study of business computing. Paper presented at The Information Systems Research Challenge: Survey Research Methods.
5. Bartels, Larry M. (2008): 'The Study of Electoral Behavior' referring *Grounding political development (2nd [www] edition)* chapter 6: defining political culture referred on 9th oct. 2018) <http://www.d.umn.edu/~schilton/Articles/GPD6.html>, accessed on 23/10/2018
6. Branding Indian Leaders, available on <http://www.brandingindianleaders.com/war-room.asp> , accessed on 23/10/2018
7. Graham, B.D. (1975): 'Studies on Indian elections: A review article', *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 2.
8. Gallagher, Michael (2008): '*Elections and Referendums*' in Daniel Caramani (Ed.), *Comparative Politics*, New York, Oxford University Press.
9. Isaac, S., & Michael, W. B. (1997). *Handbook in research and evaluation: A collection of principles, methods, and strategies useful in the planning, design, and evaluation of studies in education and the behavioral sciences*. (3rd Ed.). San Diego: Educational and Industrial Testing Services.
10. Karandikar, Rajeeva, 2014 The Business Line news paper, Published on April 21, 2014 <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/selection-of-sample-is-key-to-opinion-poll-accuracy-psephologist/article23162373.ece>, Accessed on 9/10/2018
11. Kraemer, K. L. (1991). Introduction. Paper presented at The Information Systems Research Challenge: Survey Research Methods.
12. Key, V.O. (1966). *The responsible electorate*. New York: Vintage.

13. Kumar, N.D. (1990), 'Paradigm of Electoral Culture in India: 'An Analytical Perspective'', in Dr. V.M. Bachal(Ed.) *Peoples' Mandate*, Indian Political Science Association Publication, p.77.
14. Larry M. Bartels(2008), '*The Study of Electoral Behaviour*' in Leighley, Jan E. (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behaviour*.
15. Levy, P. S., & Lemeshow, S. (1999). *Sampling of populations: Methods and applications*. (3rd ed.). New York: John Wiley and Sons.
16. Narain, Iqbal and S.P. Verma, (Eds.), (1973): *Voting Behaviour in a Changing Society*, National Book House, Delhi.
17. O'Day, J. Brian : *Political Campaigning Manuel: A step by step guide to wining elections*, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs.
18. Pavone, Tommaso (2014) :*Political Culture and Democratic Homeostasis: A Critical Review of The Civic Culture*, April 7th, 2014, https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/tpavone/files/almond_verba-the_civic_culture_critical_review_0.pdf , accessed on 9th Oct. 2018
19. Pinsonneault, A., & Kraemer, K. L. (1993). Survey research methodology in management information systems: An assessment. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 10, 75-105.
20. Psephology (2012): *India Today*, <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/plan-your-career/story/psephology-courses-108697-2012-07-10>, accessed on 9th Oct. 2018
21. Salant, P., & Dillman, D. A. (1994). *How to conduct your own survey*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, p. 57.
22. Lockerbie, Brad (1991): 'The temporal pattern of economic evaluations and vote choice in Senate elections' *March 1991*, Volume 69, Issue 3, pp 279–294., available on: Springer Link <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF00123865>,
22. Tzu, Sun (2013) : *The Art of War*, originally written in 6th Century BC, republished by Timeless Books in Oct 2013.
23. Wilson, Woodrow (1887): 'The Study of Administration', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Jun., 1887), pp. 197-222 Published by: The Academy of Political Science Stable. Available on URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2139277>
24. Yuan, Yangyang (2004): '*Considerations affecting the evaluations of the Ohio Governor in the 2002 gubernatorial election: an integrated model of priming and reasoning chain*' Dissertation Presented for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University, 2004.