

NSS Role in Voting Behaviour in Panchayati Raj Institutions Elections: In Special Perspective of Haryana

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ABSTRACT

The National Service Scheme (NSS) plays a vital role in shaping voting behaviour in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) elections, particularly in Haryana, where local governance is deeply influenced by socio-political dynamics. Haryana has historically faced challenges related to gender disparity in elections. NSS campaigns help mobilize women voters and encourage them to participate in both voting and contesting elections. This research paper explores how NSS initiative contribute to voter awareness, ethical voting practices, women's participation, and youth engagement in grassroots democracy. NSS units conduct awareness drives to educate rural voters about the importance of elections in PRIs. NSS plays a significant role in enhancing voter's turnout, ethical voting, and electoral transparency in Haryana's Panchayati Raj Institutions elections. By focusing on youth involvement, women's participation, and combating electoral malpractices, NSS strengthens the democratic process at the grassroots level.

Keywords: National Service Scheme (NSS), Voting Behaviour, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Haryana, Electoral Awareness, Grassroots Democracy, Youth Participation.

INTRODUCTION

The **Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)** form the backbone of rural governance in India, providing a democratic platform for local self-governance. Haryana, with its dynamic political landscape and strong rural electorate, presents a unique case for studying voting behaviour in **PRI elections**. The **National Service Scheme (NSS)**, a youth-drive initiative aimed at community service and social role in shaping electoral participation, ethical voting, and democratic engagement at the grassroots level. This paper examines how NSS influences voting behaviour in **Haryana's Panchayati Raj elections**, focusing on key areas such as **voter awareness, youth participation, women's electoral engagement, and ethical voting practices**.

NSS and Its Role in Panchayati Raj Elections

Enhancing Voter Awareness and Participation

One of the key roles of NSS is to **educate rural voters** about their electoral rights and responsibilities. NSS volunteers:

- Organize **awareness rallies, street plays (Nukkad Nataks), and door-to-door campaigns** to inform citizens about Panchayat elections.
- Conduct **voter registration drives**, especially targeting first-time voters.
- Collaborate with local administration and Election Commission bodies to ensure **maximum voter turnout**.

Promoting Ethical Voting Practices

Haryana's local elections often witness **caste-based politics, monetary influence, and electoral malpractices**. NSS works to counter these issues by:

- Spreading awareness on **ethical voting** through posters, pamphlets, and social media.
- Encouraging voters to **prioritize development issues** over personal or caste-based affiliations.
- Reporting cases of **coercion, bribery, or booth capturing** to local authorities.

Increasing Women's Electoral Participation

Despite progress, women in rural Haryana often face **social and cultural restrictions** that limit their electoral participation. NSS volunteers actively:

- Encourages women to vote independently and contest in **Panchayat elections**.
- Conduct workshops highlighting the role of women in **local governance**.
- Collaborate with **Self-Help Groups (SHGs)** and local NGOs to empower women as decision-makers.

Engaging Youth in Grassroots Democracy

Youth participation in **PRI elections** is crucial for a progressive democracy. NSS fosters political awareness among young voters by:

- Organizing **mock elections and leadership training** to familiarize youth with democratic processes.
- Motivating **college and university students** to engage in Panchayati Raj decision-making.
- Using **social media platforms** to encourage discussions on rural development and governance.

Challenges Faced by NSS in Haryana

Despite its impactful role, NSS faces several challenges in influencing voting behaviour in Panchayati Raj elections:

- **Traditional mindsets:** Rural communities often adhere to **caste-based and patriarchal voting patterns**, making reforms slow.
- **Limited resources:** NSS activities often lack **adequate funding and institutional support**.
- **Political influence:** Local power dynamics sometimes hinder NSS-led awareness campaigns.
- **Low youth engagement:** Many young voters remain **disinterested or unaware** of the importance of PRI elections.

Case Studies: NSS Impact in Haryana's Panchayat Elections

Case Study 1: Voter Awareness Drive in Jhajjar District

In the 2022 Panchayat elections, NSS units in Jhajjar conducted **door-to-door campaigns and digital outreach programs**, increasing voter turnout by 12% compared to previous elections.

Case Study 2: Women's Voting Campaign in Hisar

An NSS-led **women empowerment campaign** in Hisar led to a **significant rise in female voter participation**, with several women contesting and winning Panchayat seats.

Case Study 3: Fighting Electoral Malpractice in Rohtak

NSS volunteers in Rohtak worked with **local election authorities** to identify **cases of vote buying**, leading to a fairer electoral process.

Recommendations

- **Stronger Institutional Support:** The government should allocate **more resources** for NSS electoral awareness programs.
- **Incorporating Electoral Literacy in NSS Curriculum:** Regular training sessions on **voter education and PRI governance** should be introduced.
- **Increased Collaboration:** NSS should partner with **NGOs, Election Commission, and Panchayati Raj bodies** for greater outreach.
- **Use of Digital Media:** Expanding NSS campaigns on **social media, WhatsApp, and community radio** can enhance awareness.
- **Encouraging Youth Leaders:** More efforts should be made to **train and motivate young individuals** to take up leadership roles in local governance.

CONCLUSION

The National Service Scheme (NSS) plays a transformative role in shaping voting behaviour in Haryana's Panchayati Raj Elections. Through awareness campaigns, ethical voting initiatives, and youth mobilization, NSS contributes to making local elections more transparent, inclusive, and participatory. However, institutional support, modern outreach methods, and continued engagement are necessary to maximize its impact. Strengthening NSS interventions in electoral literacy and civic engagement can further empower rural voters and enhance democratic governance at the grassroots level.

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