

DISTRICT AKOLA: STRATEGIC APPROACH IN 100% ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF PWD VOTERS



"If I can, Why Can't you?"

JITENDRA S PAPALKAR IAS
District Collector & District Magistrate
Akola (Maharashtra)

**Maharashtra
Assembly Election
2019**

DISTRICT AKOLA: STRATEGIC APPROACH IN 100% ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF PWD VOTERS

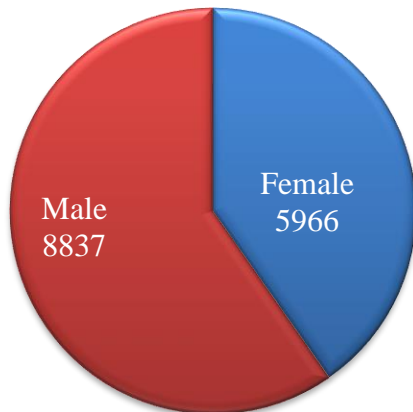
Introduction

“Democracy is a form and method of government whereby revolutionary changes in the social & economic life of the people are brought about without any blood shade.”- Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar

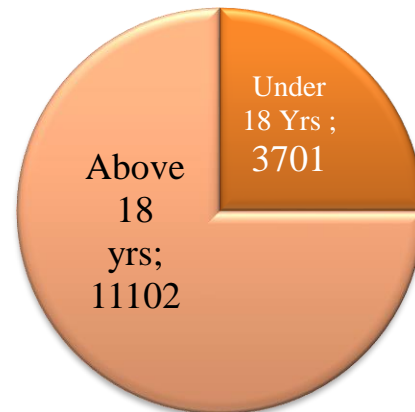
Democracy has to do a lot with social and economic changes. Election is a tool to realize the democracy and the participation of all the sections of the society is essential for the success of democracy.

In Democracy, every one’s right is important. But when it comes to the priority, the rights of the weaker section are more important. Persons with Disabilities is a section of society which is neglected at many occasions but day by day awareness is growing up and they are participating in the main stream of the society.

Total PWDs in the District



Age wise PWD Information



DISTRICT AKOLA: STRATEGIC APPROACH IN 100% ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF PWD VOTERS

Back Ground

The Rights of Person with Disability Act, 2016 defines a “Person with Disability” as a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally and others. It is at many occasions that PWDs do not participate in the electoral process and do not exercise their right to vote. So, it was decided by the District Administration to make efforts for 100% participation of PWDs in Election Process of voting & accordingly systematic detailed plan was prepared & implemented.

Strategy

To achieve the target of 100% PWD voting, Steering Committee was appointed at the district level it includes Rajesh khawale DyDEO. The District Social Welfare Officer was appointed as nodal officer. This working group met at various occasions and considered the ground realities & finalized the strategy in the District Level Steering Committee chaired by District Collector.

- ✓ PWDs were identified polling Station wise
- ✓ Polling Station wise List of PWDs Voter was prepared with the help of BLOs
- ✓ PWD Voter were marked in the photo electoral Roll with the help of the ERONET Software
- ✓ Due care was taken to provide the assured minimum facilities at all polling stations
- ✓ Political parties were sensitized through various meetings regarding the importance of the PWD voting
- ✓ Special training sessions were arranged for the polling staff and BLOs
- ✓ The NGOs like Divyang Art Gallery, Divyaang Employee Union, and Auto Rickshaw Union enthusiastically participated in this campaign.
- ✓ 1680 Chunao-Pathshalas & 432 Elector Literacy Club were established in the district.
- ✓ 94 Voter Awareness forums were formed at government offices in the district.
- ✓ More emphasis given on Interpersonal Communication with PWDs along with IEC
- ✓ Electronic Media, Print Media, Radio& Cable Network were effectively used.

DISTRICT AKOLA: STRATEGIC APPROACH IN 100% ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF PWD VOTERS

For the facilitation of the PWD voters following facilities were ensured at the polling stations

- ✓ Special entry was kept at the polling stations.
- ✓ Ramps were constructed at each polling station location and where ever it was not possible to construct the permanent Ramp, Temporary wooden Ramps were provided.
- ✓ Wheelchairs were provided at all 1703 polling stations.
- ✓ Toilet facility was ensured at all polling station locations.
- ✓ It was ensured that all polling stations were equipped with permanent shade. Wherever permanent shade was not available temporary shades were erected.
- ✓ Drinking Water facility was ensured at all polling stations.
- ✓ First aid box was provided at all polling stations.
- ✓ At each polling station two volunteers were appointed for helping PWD voters
- ✓ For Blind voters, voter slips were printed in Braille language and it was supplied to them.
- ✓ Various posters and banners were displayed outside the polling stations for helping PWD voters to exercise their voting rights in a facilitated manner.
- ✓ Locations of all polling stations were preferably at the ground floor
- ✓ Adequate space with ventilation, sufficient lighting and amenities like chair, benches and covered shelters were ensured.

To achieve the target of 100% PWD voting various initiatives have been taken by district administration

- ✓ 1 Polling station was managed by Divyaang Employees in each Assembly Constituency.
- ✓ Stickers were printed and pasted on auto rickshaw urging PWD voters to cast their votes
- ✓ Flex and Banner were printed & placed at prominent places
- ✓ A special Song “Hum Yuva Matdar Hai” was video recorded by the District Administration. This song played a vital role in motivating the voters to cast their vote.

DISTRICT AKOLA: STRATEGIC APPROACH IN 100% ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF PWD VOTERS

- ✓ Various district Icons were appointed. These district icons urged the PWD voter to cast their vote
- ✓ A special campaign named as “AAI BABAs PATRA” (Letter to Mom n Dad) was run in the district. Through this campaign student wrote letters to their parent to cast their vote & resolved not to enjoy holiday.
- ✓ Jingles were prepared and played on the Akola Municipal Corporations garbage collection vehicles, so that every morning a message was going to every house about PWD voting.
- ✓ Jingle were also broadcasted on Akola Akashwani and Radio City FM
- ✓ Awareness in rural areas was done through “Chitra Ratha”
- ✓ 7 LED walls are placed at 7 Tahsil places in Akola District, voter awareness video clips were continuously displayed on these LED walls
- ✓ Various Student organizations participated to motivate PWD voters to cast their vote.

Inputs from various NGOs and Divyaang Unions

A review meeting with PWD organizations & PWD unions was organized, Suggestions and remark from PWDs, NGOs and Union leaders were obtained in this meeting.

Open dialogue session with the district PWD committee, PWD Organization, PWD Union. Strategy was planned as per the suggestion received from the representative of the PWD NGO and Unions.

Shahir and Pravachankars working prominently in rural areas organize program of 15 to 30 min. and urged PWD voters for their voting. This created a vast impact on the minds of PWD voters

Major Initiative taken by Auto Rickshaw Union

‘When your cause is noble it is supported by the all sections of the society’.

In urban areas of the district Auto Rickshaw Driver Union made free transportation of PWD voters from their residence to polling booth. Union submitted their memorandum to this effect before the hon’ble Divisional Commissioner Amravati Shri Piyush Singh IAS. The union got the flex board printed & pasted it on their auto rickshaw, contact no were also depicted on these flex board

Major Initiative taken by Divyang Art Gallery

Divyang art Gallery is major organization in Akola district working for PWDs. They resolved to create awareness amongst the PWD voters and to urge them 100 % PWD voting.

Shri Vishal Korde Director of Divyang art Gallery was appointed as Brand Ambassador for PWD voters. Divyang art Gallery created awareness amongst PWDs through musical programs. Interviews were broadcasted from FM radios Akashwani Akola, Orange City FM Channel.

Radio RJ Nidhi, RJ Madhuri Patil had given their valuable contribution to create awareness amongst PWD voters for 100% PWD voting

Awareness amongst PWDs through Student Volunteers

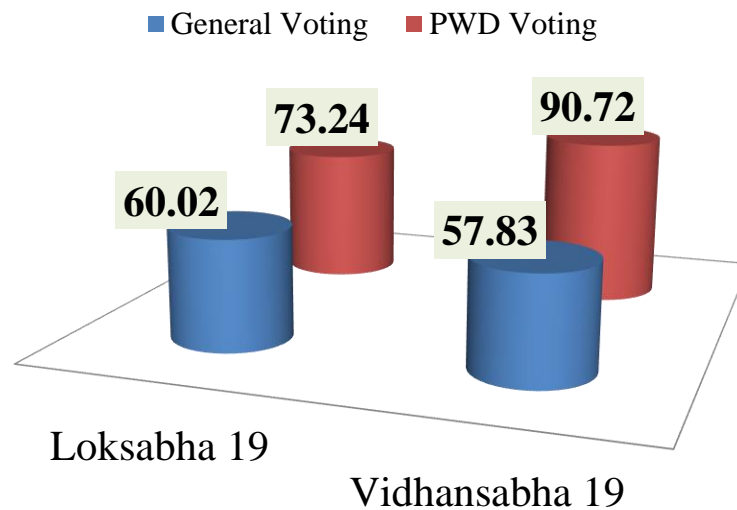
a meeting with School Headmasters was arranged at District Head Quarter. List of all PWD voters was shared with all School Headmasters. School Headmasters identified the PWD voters in their local area and appointed a student volunteer for each PWD. This student volunteer got in touch with PWD voter.

Results

In Lok Sabha election 2019, the percentage of voting of general voters was 60.02 % (**annexure 1**) the percentage of PWD voters who cast their vote in Lok Sabha election 2019 was 73.24 % (**annexure 2**). It was 13.22% more as compared with the general electors.

In assembly election 2019, the district administration took a rigorous effort to increase the polling % of the PWD voters. In assembly election 2019 the percentage of voting of general voters was 57.83 % (**annexure 3**) but the polling percentage of PWD voters was 90.72% (**annexure 4**). This was 32.89 % more than the general voter who cast their votes in assembly election 2019& approx. 17.48% more as compared with the PWD voting in the Lok Sabha election 2019

Analysis of Voting Percentage in Past Election



Conclusions

- ✓ PWDs are integral part of our society & their voting rights are equally important
- ✓ Due to apathy on the hands of the administration the voting percentage of PWD Voters in previous elections was very low
- ✓ Various majors taken by the Dist. Administration motivated the PWDs to cast their votes
- ✓ Peoples participation played key role in achieving the target
- ✓ Student Volunteers played a vital role in motivating & persuading PWD voters
- ✓ PWD Organizations played equally important role for achieving the target
- ✓ Intensive SVEEP activity help a lot to achieve the target
- ✓ If district administration rope in the efforts of all sections of society to increase the PWD voting percentage the target can be achieved easily

Another most important change observed was when PWD voter comes for voting, Normal voters realize that “if he can do, why can’t we?”. This provoking thought tends to increase the normal general percentage of voting to great extent.

All in all, we can conclude that if the district administration decides for the 100% PWD voting and rope in all the sections of society the 100% PWD voting target can be achieved easily by any district.