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## STUDY ON THE POLITICAL AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE SLUMS OF INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

A democratic system is characterised by active political participation. Democracy's nature, efficacy, and success are primarily dependent on how equally, effectively, and actually all individuals can participate. Women make up approximately half of the population, so this group needs to be given the proper consideration in the system and a fair portion of the benefits. If women citizens are denied equal chance to participate in governmental decision-making, democracy will fall short of its goals. They are to participate equally in the political and nation-building processes.

The goal of the current study was to understand the challenges slum women were facing as well as their level of political consciousness, interest, and participation in the city's functioning and electoral process. In this regard, the sample was made up of 75 women respondents from each of Chandigarh's two authorised and two unauthorised slums. The study's conclusions showed that slum women are starting to become aware of the political events taking place nearby and have begun taking part in them as well. The research also showed that the majority of respondents' husbands or other family members had an influence on their political choices. This is mostly due to the patriarchal society and poor level of education.

However, it was discovered that women living in Chandigarh's slums have begun to express a great deal of interest in political activities, and their engagement in the electoral process is rising. The state governments' willingness to step up and share the burden of successfully funding and implementing these projects and initiatives would be greatly appreciated. Only when governments take all of its citizens along and work for everyone's welfare, regardless of any form of prejudice, can democracy be truly successful.

**Keywords : Participation, Elections, Empowerment, Women.**

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy implies that men and women be treated equally. Contrary to the fundamental tenets of democracy, women are typically marginalised in a variety of spheres of life, most notably politics. The U.N. observes that women make up the "biggest excluded category in the globe." Women should be given better political participation rights to promote the development of a truly democratic spirit. Usha Narayan asserts that the first and most important stage in the pursuit of gender justice is political involvement. Even Mahatma Gandhi said in 1925, "As long as women of India do not participate in public life, there can be no redemption for the country.

Given that women make up a sizable portion of India's population overall, their involvement in politics is crucial to the success of the democratic system of government. Their long-standing social neglect in the male-dominated Indian society raises the issue of their involvement. As soon as the constitution was written, its authors understood that true democracy required not only equality but also justice. This idea gave rise to the Indian constitution, which not only guarantees women's equality but also gives the state the authority to implement positive discrimination policies in their favour in order to offset the accumulated socio-economic, educational, and political disadvantages that women suffer.

To achieve the ultimate goal of equality and justice for women in India, several provisions are included in the constitution. In addition to the preamble, the constitution's Articles 14, 15, and 16 under Part III, Articles 39, 42, and 44 under Part IV, Article 51 - A(c) under Part IV A, and Article 246 under Part XI are remarkable for their impact on our topic of inquiry. The status of women is not very positive in Chandigarh's slums. Their socioeconomic standing is generally low, and they encounter prejudice in many spheres of life. Therefore, one of the main problems has been how to empower these underprivileged women. The political empowerment of women makes women's empowerment feasible to a considerable extent.

### **Political Participation**

Nature, success and effectiveness of democracy largely depend on the extent to which equal, effective and actual participation is provided to all citizens. As women comprise almost half of the population, this section of society requires due attention in the system and a share in the process. Every Citizen's active participation in political affairs in a democracy is crucial and necessary because it provides legitimacy to the system and also strengthens the democratic fabric. Democracy will fail in its objectives if women citizens lack equal opportunity to participate in the government decision making process.

They are to be equal partners in the nation building and political development. It may be pointed out that all the citizens do not participate equally or in the same manner in any political process. The political culture of a

society greatly influences the nature of political participation of individuals. The real purpose and impact of participation is to make the citizen not a passive spectator but an agent in politics, to enable him to show his disagreement as much as to endorse what is proposed, as much to scotch initiatives as to launch them, as much to revise, criticize and block as to push, prod and hasten. However, if political participation is to have any concrete meaning, particularly in a democratic setup, all people, irrespective of any discrimination, should directly or indirectly take part in the decision making processes which affect their day to day lives and also effect the governance and progress of society.

### **Women and Political Participation**

It states that, “everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms without distinction of sex.” It is considered as a clarion call for the cause of women empowerment. It is not an argument for feminism. “Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women: women of color, working class women,” Discrimination against women, says Henry Chafe, finds in the deep rooted structure of society, in the roles women play and in a sexual division of labor which restricted females primarily to domestic sphere of life.

A gender based discriminating society tends to suffer from higher level of poverty, stagnant economic growth and poor governance. Therefore, it is argued that only substantial social changes capable of demolishing the structural basis regarding the traditional views of male and female roles is necessary to modify the existing trends in the political participation of men and women.

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To understand about how far and to what extent, the women of slums participate in diverse spheres of activities ranging from decision-making to exercising the right to vote in the local electoral process.
- To explore the awareness, interest, and involvement of women in slums.

## **3. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The current study analyses the actual situation of women living in slums, making it both exploratory and descriptive. Both primary and secondary data are used to support it. The main information is gathered through interviews with 150 respondents, 75 of whom were chosen at random from each of the two authorised and two unauthorised slums.

The secondary data was gathered from a variety of secondary sources, including newspaper articles and Census reports. Data on respondents' political preferences, awareness, choices, and participation in politics were gathered for the current study. Calculating percentages was used to analyse the data that was gathered.

**4. INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA**

Table no. 1 Distribution of Respondents according to the area and whether they have voted in MC elections

AREA	Respondents having voted		TOTAL
	YES	NO	
AUTHORIZED SLUMS	123 (82)	27 (18)	150 (100)
UNAUTHORIZED SLUMS	52 (34.67)	98 (65.33)	150 (100)
TOTAL	175 (58.33)	125 (41.67)	300 (100)

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents, or 58% of the total, had cast a ballot in the 2011 MC elections. The data also reveals that in approved slums, a very high percentage of voters (almost 82%) were registered. While only 35% of respondents in unlicensed slums cast ballots in the elections. This disparity was caused by a number of variables. Slums that have been recognised by the government as authorised or informed slums gain political influence. The authorised or notified slum then appears on the city's political and financial map after notification. And after the notification is complete, the corporators, the lowest rung of elected officials, distribute voting cards and view the slum as a "vote bank." But at least this indicates that the locals have some sway. Many slum inhabitants receive voter cards before they receive official ID documents. However, most of the responders in unofficial slums lacked voter IDs, preventing them from casting a ballot.

When the respondents were asked why they cast vote? Majority of them replied that they were positive that if their candidate won, they would get better basic amenities. When it does not happen, they are disappointed but have no choice but to wait for five years and vote for someone else.

**Table no. 2. Distribution of respondents according to area and on the basis of whether they took leave for casting vote.**

Area	Respondents took leave for casting vote		Total
	YES	NO	
Authorized Slums	103 (83.74)	20 (16.26)	123 (100)
Unauthorized Slums	41 (78.84)	11 (21.16)	52 (100)
Total	144 (82.28)	31 (17.72)	175* (100)

According to the data, 82% of respondents who participated in the 2011 MC elections took time off to cast their ballots. After voting their ballots, over 18% of respondents resumed their jobs. This demonstrates that women in slums value their ability to vote. Additionally, the regional political parties have been successful in influencing them and getting them to cast ballots.

The respondents had to choose who to vote for as soon as they made the decision to cast a ballot. An effort was made to research the numerous elements that affected the respondents' choice of candidate.

**Tableno.3.Distribution of respondents according to area and to whom they vote**

		To whom respondents vote		Total
Area	Party	Work done by candidate	Any other	
Authorized slums	81 (65.8)	20 (16.3)	22 (17.9)	123 (100)

Unauthorized slums	37 (71.1)	3 (5.8)	12 (23.1)	52 (100)
Total	118 (67.4)	23 (13.1)	34 (19.5)	175* (100)

The data demonstrate that the respondents' votes were impacted by a variety of variables. Some of the causes were the impact of political parties, the candidate running for office in that area's work, awareness raised by good campaigning (pamphlets, posters), and the influence of family and friends. After analysing the data, it was discovered that 2/3 of all respondents voted for the political party, 13% voted for the work the competing candidate had done in their area, and 19% cast their vote based on other considerations, such as the candidate their family or friends supported or because they were impressed by the candidate's campaigning, etc.

This investigation demonstrates that women in slums are beginning to become aware of and engage in local political activities. This is a step in the right direction for their empowerment. Political parties in the area are aware of their base of supporters and do everything in their power to entice them to vote for them. Women's complaints are taken into consideration during the process, and occasionally they are given assistance in resolving issues, obtaining voter registration cards, etc. This really encourages the women living in slums to participate in politics in the hopes that the political party or candidate they support will be able to resolve their issues. The respondents were asked to list the major political parties they were familiar with in order to gauge their level of political awareness.

**Tableno.4.Distribution of respondents according to area and whether they knew the names of major political parties**

Area	The Names of Major Political Parties of the Region					Total
	Congress	BJP	Akali Dal	Janta Dal	BSP	
<b>Authorized slums</b>	<b>115</b> (77)	<b>110</b> (73.3)	<b>60</b> (40)	<b>52</b> (35)	<b>47</b> (31.3)	<b>384*</b>
<b>Unauthorized slums</b>	<b>130</b> (87)	<b>116</b> (77.3)	<b>23</b> (15.3)	<b>25</b> (17)	<b>32</b> (21.3)	<b>326*</b>

<b>Total</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>710*</b>
	<b>(81.67)</b>	<b>(75.3)</b>	<b>(27.7)</b>	<b>(25.7)</b>	<b>(26.3)</b>	

The findings indicate that, overall, more than four in five respondents were familiar with the names of the Congress Party and the Bhartiya Janata Party, respectively. The knowledge of other national/regional parties like the Akali Dal, Janta Dal, B.S.P, etc. was held by almost one-fourth of the respondents. This shows how successful these national and local political parties have been in expanding their power in these impoverished regions. Additionally, as a result of their interactions with urban households and the political parties' substantial campaigning in urban areas, they are becoming more aware of the significance of voting and the advantages associated with doing so.

This is encouraging for any democratic system as well as for the overall empowerment of women. In the Indian setting, a patriarchal value system has significantly influenced Indian culture and social ethos. In general, women have not been independent decision makers in the nation due to strongly ingrained social beliefs and behaviours. In most cases, the decision has been affected by the demands and wants of male family members. This also holds true for their political choices. On political topics, they are typically influenced by their spouses or other male family members.

This holds true for all women, not only those who are underprivileged, ignorant, or dependent on other people's money. It also holds true for educated, self-sufficient women.

Husbands enjoy a very high level of status in the families of slum dwellers. In fact, he is the one who actually makes the majority of family decisions. Slum women were discovered to heavily rely on their husbands for guidance and decision-making in every area. Further investigation was done to determine whether the husbands of the respondents in our study had any influence on their political choices, such as who they would vote for.

**Table no. 5. Distribution of respondents according to area and their awareness about various schemes for the improvement and rehabilitation of slums by the government.**

Area	Awareness about any awareness scheme for slum improvement and rehabilitation		Total
	YES	NO	
Authorized slums	107	43	150

	(71.3)	(28.7)	
Unauthorized slums	57 (38)	93 (62)	150
Total	164 (54.7)	136 (45.3)	300

According to the information in the table above, just 38% of respondents in unlawful slums were aware of the various plans and initiatives, compared to 72% of respondents in authorised slums. This might be the case because responders who live in permitted slums stay longer than those who do not. Additionally, because they had received benefits under various programs, respondents in authorised slums were more knowledgeable about these initiatives than their counterparts.

## 5. CONCLUSION

A democratic system is characterised by active political participation. Democracy's nature, efficacy, and success are primarily dependent on how equally, effectively, and actually all individuals can participate. Women make up approximately half of the population, so this group needs to be given the proper consideration in the system and a fair portion of the benefits. Additionally, it was discovered that residents of slums were unaware of their rights, which prevented them from taking use of numerous government-run programmes. The increase in respondents' political engagement was one encouraging finding. As a result, they will feel empowered because the system they chose will owe them a good life.

Additionally, some of the respondents in the permitted slums have developed into leaders and have been communicating the complaints of the locals to the higher authorities. Given that they make up a sizable portion of their voter base, even the major political parties in that area have begun to show an interest in the welfare of these residents of slums. After reviewing the aforementioned data, it is clear that respondents' political participation is growing as they become more aware of the value of doing so.

However, political parties and governments should also take these people's issues seriously and not just view them as a source of electors. They should work to find solutions to these people's problems and endeavour to include them in the operation of local government. They should have their basic needs, issues, and progress



taken into consideration because they are a part of the city and society. If proper actions are not taken for the elevation and rehabilitation of slum women, their issues will continue to grow. What fresh resources might be made available for the creation and execution of the various plans and programmes developed for them has to be considered. The majority of the responsibility for creating and carrying out these initiatives has up until now fallen on the central government.

The state governments' willingness to step up and share the burden of successfully funding and implementing these projects and initiatives would be greatly appreciated. Only when governments take all of its citizens along and work for everyone's welfare, regardless of any form of prejudice, can democracy be truly successful.

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