

Full Length Research

Participation of Scheduled Caste Women in Politics-A Case Study of Rural and Urban Women of Nainital District of Kumaun Region

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The present study is an attempt to know the extent of political participation of rural and urban scheduled caste women of Nainital district of Kumaun region. Purposive sampling technique was adopted for selecting the sample of 300 women. For the purpose of this study Nainital town was considered to represent the urban area and three villages, namely, Beluwakhan, Kuriagaon and Gethiya from Bhimtal Block were selected to represent the rural area which had sufficiently large proportion of scheduled caste population. This study shows that the involvement of women in politics is still in the darkness of traditional culture. They do turn up of in large numbers for voting but lag behind in other activities of political participation.

Keywords: Political Interest, Political Identification, Kumaun Region, Scheduled Caste Women.

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INTRODUCTION

It can be said that adult franchise, provision for reservation, abolition of untouchability and constitutional safeguards have hit hard the traditional differentiation and provided chances¹ to the women to participate in politics, but the position of scheduled caste women is still lower than that of other women in our country. After independence, the introductions of panchayati raj and adult franchise have brought about definite change in the political consciousness and awareness among the scheduled caste in general. They are becoming conscious of their democratic rights. But in the case of women belonging to scheduled caste, it is limited to a

handful of individuals who come from urban-based, well-to-do, and educated families of the community. A few of them in every state who have taken to teaching, medicine etc. are no doubt enlightened and are no less politically aware and socially conscious than the women of higher castes. But the majority of the scheduled caste women are poor, illiterate, superstitious and suppressed under the weight of custom and traditional values, borrowed from the orthodox higher caste women.² While scheduled caste women's participation in diverse fields has been increasing, the insignificant political participation of scheduled caste women in a secular state like India is a matter of concern. Keeping these considerations in mind,

the author conducted a study of the political participation of scheduled caste women in Kumaun.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dhaka and Dhaka (2005)³ in their survey based study "Behind the veil: Dalit women in Panchayati Raj" conducted in Haryana focuses on the status and participation of scheduled caste women in decision making institutions at the local level i.e. Panchayati Raj Institutions. Their work helps in understanding the various issues at stake due to which the scheduled caste women continue to remain out of decision making institutions at the local level.

Makwana (2011)⁴ in the book "Political participation of scheduled caste women in panchayat: position, problems and prescriptions" analyses the role of scheduled caste women leadership in panchayat, particularly in the light of 73rd Constitutional Amendments. The main objective of the study is to evaluate awareness, socioeconomic profile, political background, achievements, participation of women sarpanchs in various activities and their ability to take decision in different public affairs.

Malik (2011)⁵ in his study "Political participation of dalit women in pri-s challenges and response" conducted in Gazipur and Mau districts of Uttar Pradesh focuses on what are the motivating factors for dalit women to enter into politics and what are the socio-economic factors involved in their political participation. In his study he also tries to explore three important aspects of political participation i.e. why they come to village politics and what are the motivating factors behind their candidature; how they manage to get support for nomination and what are the sources of financial support, issues relating to safety and security before and after elections; and mode of entry to panchayats. Moreover, he also tries to analyze various aspects of access to political participation and mode of entry into the panchayats.

Dinesha (2014)⁶ in his paper entitled "Dalit women panchayat representatives and social exclusion: myth or reality?" deals with the social exclusion faced by the dalit women elected representatives from Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka state. In his study he finds out that large numbers of women, particularly dalit women, have gained their entry into the panchayati raj institutions all over the country which indicates phenomenal shift in women's participation in decision making. However, despite making panchayati-raj a constitutional body and implementation of a large number of development schemes, they have not achieved much needed success

in empowerment of the excluded sections of the society. Hence, there is a need to make marginalized people more active and participatory in panchayat raj system.

Adin and Singhe (2014)⁷ in their study "Participation of women in rural politics-with reference to dalit community" makes an effort to know the extent of participation of dalit women elected representatives in panchayat and problems faced by them.

Singh (2014)⁸ in his study "Empowerment of dalit women through local self-governance- with reference to Kandhamal district of Odisha" looks into some of the aspects relating to dalit women representation and participation in panchayati raj institutions with special focus on active participation in decision making processes and involvement in planning and implementation processes of government programmes.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the proposed research are:

- (a) To know the degree of political interest of rural and urban scheduled caste women.
- (b) To know the extent of their involvement in politics.
- (c) To know which are the individuals and parties they politically identify with.
- (d) To find out the factors those have acted as deterrents to their participation in the political process.

METHODOLOGY

A multi-level sampling has been undertaken in the study for the selection of the units of enquiry (urban and rural) and the units of analysis (scheduled caste women) separately. As the variation between rural and urban counterparts of scheduled caste women was expected to be great, the selection procedure of the samples is based upon the 'Non-Probability Purposive Sampling'. The main reason for taking up 'Non-Probability Purposive Sampling' is that the target scheduled caste women are living with other castes and purely random sampling would have not worked. In order to make the study meaningful and objective, the tools of the study depending upon the requirement have been interviews, schedules and observation. Sampling of the units of analysis was undertaken on an 'incidental basis'. This was so for the reason that in the hill villages it is difficult to find people during the daytime as they are usually out in the fields and can hardly afford to give time. For the purposes of this study Nainital town was considered to represent the urban area and three villages, namely,

Table 1: Gender composition of the respondents in the sample villages of the study area

Village Name	General Category			Scheduled Caste			Grand Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Beluwakhan	243	240	483	509	479	988	1471
Kuriagaon	128	128	256	734	708	1442	1698
Gethiya	83	80	163	379	330	709	872

Source: Present survey

Table 2: Interest in politics

Responses	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of Respondents	%	No of Respondents	%
Interested in politics	6	4.00	11	7.33
Somewhat interested	9	6.00	17	11.33
Not interested	135	90.00	122	81.33
Total	150	100	150	100

Source: Present survey

Beluwakhan, Kuriagaon and Gethiya from Bhimtal Block were selected to represent the rural areas. (Table 1)

A sample of 300 women was drawn from the areas selected. Thus, 150 scheduled caste women from Nainital town were used to represent the urban sample, and 150 women from the three villages (50 women from each village) were drawn in the sample group. For the purpose of analysis, the 3 villages were clubbed as one and used for representing the rural area.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Analytically, political participation is thought to be composed of three separate but related components that are political interest, involved participation and political identification.

(1) Political Interest

Political interest is perhaps the most important component of political participation. Accordingly, the following section attempts to describe the political interest of the rural and urban scheduled caste women of Nainital district of Kumaun region. The extent of interest of the rural and urban women in political talks and election results is taken as an indicator of their political interest.

(i) Respondents Interest in Politics

As a step towards finding out whether the respondents possessed at least minimum level of interest in politics, we asked them a direct question "are you interested in politics" and an effort was made to gauge the intensity of

political interest of the female respondents on the basis of their answers. (Table 2)

The survey findings indicate that the interest of women in politics is higher in urban areas (7.33 per cent) as compared to rural areas (4 per cent) while a fair number of women are interested in politics, the significantly large body of the respondents are politically dormant or apathetic. This came out clearly during the interview when one married respondent from Kuriagaon (a graduate) responded to the question about her interest in politics "Yes I cannot afford to say that I am not interested in politics, but to be very honest I do not get enough time to keep myself fully informed about politics as most of my time goes in performing household responsibilities."

(ii) Respondents Interest in Election Results

The next question was as to what was the degree of interest the women showed in election results. This too was a direct question which aimed at obtaining a quantifying response. (Table 3)

Though election results are keenly watched and discussed by the people in general but the survey result reveals that the interest of females in knowing the election results is quite low.

(II) Involved Participation

The second component of political participation is the involved participation. Here the real involvement of women in politics in relation to status was measured in terms of the women actual or active participation.

Table 3: Interest in election results

Interest	Rural respondents		Urban respondents	
	No. of respondents	%	No. of respondents	%
Much	22	14.66	45	30.00
Average	17	11.33	39	26.00
Not at all	111	74.00	66	44.00
Total Respondents	150	100	50	100

Source: Present survey

Table 4: Number of times the respondent has voted

Response Category	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No. of respondents	%	No. of respondents	%
Voted in all elections	129	86.00	121	80.66
Voted in some elections	4	2.66	7	4.66
Not voted at all	17	11.33	22	14.66
Total Respondents	150	100	150	100

Source: Present survey

Table 5: Reasons for voting

Reasons for Voting	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of respondents	%	No. of respondents	%
Support the party	16	12.03	21	16.40
Oppose the candidate	19	14.28	23	17.96
Civic duty	7	5.26	17	13.28
Deserving candidate	23	17.29	18	14.06
No reason	68	51.12	49	38.28
Total respondents	133	100	128	100

Source: Present survey

(i) Voting

Participation in voting is the most important aspect in the sphere of political participation. To elicit their participation in elections and voting pattern, the respondents were first asked how often they had exercised their franchise since they first became eligible to vote. The analysis of this question is presented in Table 4.

As seen from the frequencies in Table 4 the exercise of the right to vote occupies a fairly significant place among the respondents. Questions were also asked from the respondents to ascertain the reasons behind the exercise of their voting right or not voting. 133 rural and 128 urban respondents participated in the voting process while 17 rural and 22 urban respondents, respectively did not take part in the voting process. (Table 5)

It is quite evident from the table 5 given that the respondents usually voted either to support or oppose a candidate

The respondents (rural and urban) cited few reasons for not voting which clearly indicated that they are politically dormant or apathetic. (Table 6)

As a step towards ascertaining whether and how far the

respondents were influenced by others in their decision to vote, a question was asked about this matter from them. They were asked to indicate from whom they took advice regarding where or for whom to vote.

It is quite evident from the following table 7 that though caste plays an important role in the election process but respondents whether rural or urban do not vote on the basis of caste only. With the establishment of the parliamentary democracy in India, political parties grow in number and begin to play the role in the making of the society. 12.03 per cent rural and 14.84 per cent urban respondents are of the view that good political parties are that who fulfil their promises and understands the grievances of the people.

Impact on a person during and on the day of voting is necessary to identify. To assess the experience of the use of force on the scheduled castes women (133 rural and 128 urban) during election they were asked two related questions: one, whether anybody has ever stopped them from voting; and two, whether they have been forced to vote for a particular person or party. (Table 8&9)

Leaving aside 16.54 per cent and 19.54 per cent rural respondents all the remaining women were neither

Table 6: Reasons for not voting

Reasons for not Voting	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of respondents	%	No. of respondents	%
Vote makes no difference	7	41.17	9	40.90
Don't like politics/ protest by not voting	4	23.52	6	27.27
No difference in candidates	6	35.29	7	31.81
Total Respondents	17	100	22	100

Source: Present survey

Table 7: Main factors deciding polling /voting

Basis of voting	Rural respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No. of respondents	%	No. of respondents	%
On the basis of caste	28	21.05	21	16.40
Political party	16	12.03	19	14.84
Ability of the candidate	47	35.33	53	41.40
No consideration	42	31.57	35	27.34
Total respondents	133	100	128	100

Source: Present survey

Table 8: Whether respondent was ever stopped from voting

Responses	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of respondents	%	No of respondents	%
Yes	22	16.54	13	10.15
No	111	83.27	115	89.84
Total respondents	133	100	128	100

Source: Present survey

Table 9: Whether respondent was ever forced to vote

Responses	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of respondents	%	No of respondents	%
Yes	26	19.54	11	8.59
No	107	80.45	117	91.40
Total respondents	133	100	128	100

Source: Present survey

stopped from voting nor forced to vote for any specific person or party as compared to 10.15 per cent and 8.59 per cent urban respondents. This is a common allegation that the members of the scheduled castes are subjects of pressure and force during elections.

(ii) Participation in Election Campaign

The election campaign provides another sphere for women to participate in the political process the campaign strategy plays an important part in the election process. (Table 10)

As far as participation of the female respondents in the election campaign is concerned an overwhelming majority of the rural respondents (74.66 per cent) did not

participate in election campaign as compared to 67.33 per cent urban respondents. In Table 11 we have tried to gauge the level of involvement of our respondents in election campaign. As only 38 (rural) and 49 (urban) scheduled caste female respondents had actually participated in the election campaign thus only they were considered as active respondents. To add more knowledge of the role of the active respondents in the campaign actives they were asked some additional questions.

(a) The first question in this regard was whether or not the active respondents inspired the voters during the election period to vote or guided them to vote for a particular candidate.

Table 10: Respondents participation in election campaign

Responses	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of respondents	%	No of respondents	%
Yes	38	25.33	49	32.66
No	112	74.66	101	67.33
Total respondents	150	100	150	100

Source: Present survey

Table 11: Respondents inspiring the voters

Responses	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of respondents	%	No of respondents	%
Yes	37	97.36	43	87.75
No	1	2.63	6	12.24
Total respondents	38	100	49	100

Source: Present survey

Table 12: Respondents giving funds for elections

Responses	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of respondents	%	No of respondents	%
Yes	1	2.63	3	6.12
No	37	97.36	46	93.87
Total respondents	38	100	49	100

Source: Present survey

Table 13: Respondents collecting funds for elections

Responses	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of respondents	%	No of respondents	%
Yes	11	28.94	17	34.69
No	27	71.05	32	65.30
Total respondents	38	100	49	100

Source: Present survey

The active respondents in campaign activates in the rural and urban areas were actively encouraging the voters to vote and besides this they were also trying to politically educate the voters by making them realise the importance of the voting right.

(b) The second question which was asked from the respondents was as to how they managed the election fund.(Table 12)

In the case of rural female respondents only one female respondent claimed to contribute funds for party or the candidate in comparison to 3 urban female respondents. The female rural respondents of our survey are not financially strong enough to donate funds to any election activities but instead they rely on some political party or political leader to financially help them. (Table 13)

In the case of fund collection by the respondents for the party, candidate or other election activities we get to see that again the urban female respondents surpass in this task as 34.69 per cent urban respondents are able to collect fund in comparison to 28.94 per cent rural respondents.

(c) The third question was whether the respondents simply participated in election meetings or whether they played an active role in organising election meetings. (Table 14)

The response to the question in table 15 gives a picture of higher participation in election meeting by the urban female respondents (85.71 per cent) in comparison to rural female respondents (68.42 per cent).

(d) The fourth question which was put before the respondents to gain knowledge of the true extent of

Table 14: Respondents participation in election meetings

Responses	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of respondents	%	No of respondents	%
Yes	26	68.42	42	85.71
No	12	31.57	7	14.28
Total respondents	38	100	49	100

Source: Present survey

Table 15: Accompanying party candidates for distribution of pamphlets

Responses	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of respondents	%	No of respondents	%
Yes	33	86.84	46	93.87
No	5	13.15	3	6.12
Total respondents	38	100	49	100

Source: Present survey

Table 16: Respondents involvement in door to door election campaign

Responses	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of respondents	%	No of respondents	%
Yes	36	94.73	49	100.00
No	2	5.26	-	-
Total respondents	38	100	49	100

Source: Present survey

Table 17: Motivating factor behind election activities

Factor	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of respondents	%	No of Respondents	%
Insistence of own caste	18	47.36	21	42.85
Insistence of higher caste	-	-	3	6.12
Insistence of leader	2	5.26	7	14.28
Insistence of party	6	15.78	4	8.16
Insistence of relatives	12	31.57	14	28.57
Total	38	100	49	100

Source: Present survey

involvement in politics was whether they distributed pamphlets cards along with any party candidates.

Respondents of both the areas showed greater enthusiasm for this activity as this activity provided them good outing.

(e) Door to door election campaign is a very important political activity which usually arouses great enthusiasm among the respondents thus to get a clear knowledge in this regard they were asked to give their views. (Table 16)

Table 16 clearly shows that 94.73 per cent of the rural respondents participated in door to door campaign while in the urban area all the 49 respondents were involved in this activity.

Summarily speaking, the main motivating factor behind the participation of rural and urban respondents in election activities is the identification and support of their caste and kin members. (Table 17)

(iii) Membership of a Political Party

Regarding the question of membership of any political party only the 19 rural and 41 urban respondents responded in positive manner. (Table 18)

(iv) Contesting Elections

Besides voting, attending political meetings, participating in election campaigns or becoming members of some political parties, the most active form of political participation by females is by contesting elections at any

Table 18: Membership of a political party

Responses	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of respondents	%	No of respondents	%
Yes	19	12.66	41	27.33
No	131	87.33	109	72.66
Total respondents	150	100	150	100

Source: Present survey

Table 19: Whether respondents contested any election

Responses	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of respondents	%	No of respondents	%
Yes	12	8.00	25	16.66
No	138	92.00	125	83.33
Total respondents	150	100	150	100

Source: Present survey

Table 20: To which level they have contested elections-local, state or national.

Contested Election	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of respondents	%	No of respondents	%
College/School	-		13	52.00
Panchayat/Municipality	12	100.00	11	44.00
Vidhan Sabha	-		1	4.00
Lok Sabha	-		-	-
Total Respondents	12	100	25	100

Source: Present survey

level-local, state or national. In this regard the respondents were asked two sets of questions (a) have they ever contested any election (b) to which level they have contested elections-local, state or national. (Table 19)

It was found during our survey study that more urban respondents (25) contested elections in comparison to the rural respondents (12). The respondents who had contested elections were asked as to which level they had contested elections. (Table 20)

None of the rural respondents seemed to contest election at college or school level. During our survey we found that only one female respondent had contested Vidhan Sabha election. None of the respondents from both the areas (rural and urban) had ever contested a Parliamentary election. This means that the election contested were mostly at the local level which depicts a lower level of political participation at the state and central level. The women who had taken part in the election were able to contest election because of the reservation facility at the panchayati/municipality level.

(III) Political Identification

The third essential component of political participation is political identification. People take interest in politics if

they identify the political party as well as the candidates. It is the political party and political leaders which can generate interest among the people. Within this framework the following section is devoted to the analysis of political identification of the rural and urban scheduled castes women.

(i) Ideal Leader

To further investigate the interest of the respondents in politics they were asked to choose their favourite politician out of a list of some eminent political leaders of the country. (Table 21)

All the respondents showed interest in one or the other political leader.

(ii) Party favouring Scheduled Castes

In the next question, the women were asked to give the names of the party whom they considered well-wishers of the scheduled castes. (Table 22)

From the responses of the respondents it becomes very clear that it is the Congress Party which favours the interest of the scheduled caste people.

Table 21: Respondents favourite politicians

Ideal Leader	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of Respondents	%	No of Respondents	%
Smt.Indira Gandhi	53	35.33	66	44.00
Lalu Prasad	14	9.33	17	11.33
Mayawati	72	48.00	39	26.00
N.D Tiwari	3	2.00	7	4.66
Yashpal Arya	8	5.33	21	14.00
Total Respondents	150	100	150	100

Source: Present survey

Table 22: Political parties perceived as well-wishers of scheduled caste

Party	Rural Respondents		Urban Respondents	
	No of Respondents	%	No of Respondents	%
Congress	96	64.00	103	68.66
Bharatiya Janta Party	9	6.00	11	7.33
Bahujan Samaj Party	45	30.00	36	24.00
Total	150	100	150	100

Source: Present survey

CONCLUSION

In the current study an attempt has been made to investigate and comprehend the level of political participation of the rural and urban scheduled caste women. In the societies where women, especially women from lower strata of the society, take much interest in the political processes, a great difference can be made in the political system. Especially in the rural areas the democratic system is considered to be better because of the three tier panchayati raj system that provides more opportunities to directly participate in the election process. However, the political participation of the scheduled caste women is more in the urban areas because of more exposure and general awareness. The findings of the present survey indicate that generally both rural and urban scheduled caste females have lower interest in politics. Besides interest in politics, the participation of women in political activities like rallies, demonstrations, election campaigns, voting experience, presents a true picture of their real involvement in politics. Both rural and urban women have high political participation in terms of voting but the majority of respondents do not cast their votes according to their own motivation but are influenced by others in their decision to vote. In the twenty first century, the scheduled caste women in the Nainital District still experience pressures to vote or not to vote, which indicates the continuance of a negative trend. Though a large number of women respondents took part in the voting process, they took no active part in politics they prefer to engage themselves in other activities besides politics, which they consider a game of the rich.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations have been drawn on the basis of the hardships of the scheduled caste women seen during the course of the present survey work. In order to hasten the process of empowerment and political participation of scheduled caste women it is crucial to realise the importance of training programmes. The government should provide information and training to elected women representatives in rural and urban areas using information manuals, mobile training programs and through audio-visual mediums. The training programmes for the elected women representatives (rural and urban) will certainly assist them to take up political and leadership positions. The government in order to ensure active political participation of scheduled caste women at local level should monitor the work of the elected women as well as should look into the factors hindering her working. The formal education system should be altered to suit the requirements of the women in hilly region. The content of school curriculum should be such as to give greater emphasis on political education and knowledge of political rights. In view of the widespread illiteracy, ignorance, the situation of the scheduled caste women cannot be enhanced unless scheduled caste females in the age group 18-40 are covered by adult education programme and are made aware of their basic rights and responsibilities. The poor economic status of the scheduled caste women generally retards their active role in politics. Majority of the members of this community are still leading a life of exploitation and humiliation. Usually the male members of the family migrate to urban areas and the females are left behind to look after the family. To

assist their families female members usually engage themselves into most meagre jobs. To address this problem, efforts should be made by the government to grant financial assistance to poor scheduled caste families for setting up small business (leather work, basket making, weaving, candle making, and poultry). The scheduled caste women should be provided vocational education which is skill based and provides the student knowledge and knowhow to lead an independent life. Government should ensure that the facilities offered by the state should not be limited to the well-off section of the scheduled castes but should be passed on to needier people of their society so that others also benefit from the programmes and facilities meant for the scheduled caste population.

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