

Political Awareness Among Rural Women of Punjab: A Case Study of Sangrur District

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Abstract: India is a democratic nation. It is considered as the world's largest democracy. Participation of people in working of government is the basic necessity for the success of democracy. It is significant that the extent of participation of individual and various groups in politics depends upon the level of their 'awareness'. Thus the awareness about politics is the prerequisite of participation. Political awareness broadly defined as a knowledge and information that a person possesses about the nature, structures, functions, activities and problems of the political system in which an individual lives. In spite of constitutional provisions of gender equality and other political rights, only a small number of women have been able to make room for themselves in decision making process due to the lack of political consciousness. Many steps have been taken for the women empowerment as so far. There are many constitutional provisions about equal political participation of women. The 73rd and 74th amendment of the Indian constitution ensured the reservation of one third of Panchayats seats for women. These amendments brought about significant changes in the political scenario of the country with regard to women's participation in politics. But over the years, many researchers reveal that these amendments have had little effect on women's lives at the grassroots level. While political indicators reflects an increasing number of women contesting elections and holding offices in villages, study suggests that in most of the cases women's political participation gets reduced to tokenism and rubber stamp. Women empowerment is incomplete without the political awareness and their participation in the social, economic and political institutions. The aim of this paper is to analyze the pattern of political awareness among women with special reference to their knowledge about the political institutions of the country as well as their participation in the local self government and other decisions making structures. This paper also examines the role of political awareness in strengthening the political participation in politics and empowerment of rural women. It also analyzes the impact of social institutions like marriage, family etc. on the level of political awareness among rural women. This study is specifically confined to the four villages of Sangrur District of Punjab.

Keywords: Political Awareness, Rural Women, Punjab

1. Introduction

Women emancipation is an action that refers to both the process of self empowerment and professional support of people, which enables them to overcome their lack of awareness and powerlessness and eventually to use equal spaces and choices in society. Hence, the development of the country is closely linked with the liberation of women. No society can flourish if the women are not given their due place in the process of social development. Without equal participation of women, it is impossible to develop a democratic political, economic, social, educational and

cultural set up. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar rightly said, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved." Indian democracy is the largest in the world where the women constitute half of the population. However, in our society little progress has been witnessed in the participation of women in different activities, rural development programs and availing various opportunities in the past due to certain prevailing social evils and cultural backwardness of rural system, which have been restricting women to participate in outdoor activities and to get the opportunities of bringing equality in their statues. Women have made significant contribution in societies but their

rights are still secondary priority, almost everywhere. However, despite development planning, and the special statues accorded to women in the Indian constitution, there has not been a substantial, qualitative improvement in the position of large majority of women. Yet they have not been absolutely free from some discrimination and exploitation by the society. Only a few women of privileged classes have been able to establish their potential so far. Therefore, the benefit of society as a whole, the government should work to promote the women emancipation.

The aim of this paper to analyze the pattern of political awareness among women with special reference to their knowledge about the political institutions and structures of the country as well as their participation in political process, activities and other decision making structures. This study is specially confined to the four villages of Sangrur region of Punjab.

2. Methodology

The present study relies very much on primary data, and wherever necessary, secondary data available in the form of books, articles, newspapers, official/ unofficial websites, government documents, etc, have been used in order to supplement the former. The primary data were collected through schedule method. The questionnaire schedules were pre - tested among Panchayat member women. By using the observational method the psychological aspects of awareness judged though the oral conversation with the women. Wherever it is possible, information was cross-checked in this manner.

3. Political Awareness

India is a democratic nation. It is considered as the world's largest democracy. Participation of people in working of government is the basic necessity for the success of democracy. It is significant that the extent of participation of individual and various groups in politics depends upon the level of their 'awareness'. The concept of political awareness consists of two words 'political' and 'awareness'. Firstly, there is an attempt to understand the concept of politics and awareness separately and then jointly with the concept of political culture and political socialization.

There are many views regarding the meaning of politics or to be political. Traditionally only the activities regarding state and government considered political and persons and issues associated with these activities considered as political. Mostly the activities and social institutions are beyond the area of politics. But as the time passed, many changes took place in social sciences and with wide range of researches and many social issues attracted the scientists of political science towards the society. And at present, the main focus is on 'power' that plays a crucial part in the struggle in which individual and groups involved. Politics is the activity by which differing interest within a given unit of rule are conciliated by giving them in power in proportion to their

importance to the welfare and the survival of the whole community. [1]

Feminist tradition of politics proclaims that this struggle for power is amongst the politically strong men and again over the women. Millett (1970) for instance describes 'patriarchal government' as an institution whereby 'that half of the populace which is female is controlled by that half which is male'. [2] According to Marxist economy plays a crucial role in the power struggle between haves and have not. The politics can be seen in every social activity where the power exercises. Politics is a phenomenon found in and between all groups, institutions and societies involving all spheres of human endeavour, public and private. It is manifested in the activities of cooperation, negotiation and struggle over use, production and distribution of resources. It is an element of human life, an inescapable dimension of production and reproduction of society. Accordingly, politics is about power, about the forces which influence and reflect its distribution and use, and about the effect of this or resource use and distribution. Politics is about the transformative capacity of social agents, agencies and institutions; it is not about government or governments always. [3]

In general term the meaning of awareness is the possession of exact information. Awareness is a noun of term aware which means having knowledge, being conscious and informed about some issues, activities, process, and phenomenon and so on. Therefore, Political awareness means the knowledge and information which one has about ones political system, its role, its input and output. [4] Political awareness broadly defined as a knowledge and information that a person possesses about the nature, structures, functions, activities and problems of the political system in which an individual lives. Political awareness is a key concept to understand the overall nature of a particular political system because political awareness shapes the political opinions and commitments of people leading to the political participation in the political processes of the system. Therefore, the study of political awareness becomes an important to determine the manifest as well as latent capacity of political system for modernization and development.

Awareness is closely linked with socialization. Socialization plays an important role to aware individual about his surrounding and political environment. Political socialization is the process by which political culture maintained and changed. Through the performance of this function, individual are inducted into political culture, their orientation towards political subjects are formed. [5] Family, school, peer groups, social institution, public institution, mass media, political parties, pressure groups are the various agents of political socialization. Unfortunately throughout the history women in general have been kept outside the public domain of politics by most of the political thinkers and philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Rousseau because of their suitability in caring roles as mothers and wives. The public private divide remains as the foundation of the various forms of world democracies. [6]

There are number of provisions in the constitution and another legal framework. Although, the nature of Indian society is patriarchal but the Indian constitution provides the equal status to women and men. Gender based discrimination is prohibited. To remedy the lower participation of women in politics, India establish reservation for women by the recent constitutional amendments (73rd and 74th) which came into force from April 24, 1993, which brought about significant changes in the political scenario of the country with regard to women's participation in the politics by giving 33% reservation to women. The Women's Reservation Bill (108th amendment) has been introduced in the national parliament to reserve 33% of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha seats for women. The bill is yet to be passed by Lok Sabha and signed into law. [7]

4. Political Awareness Among Rural Women in Sangrur District

Sangrur is a district in the Indian state of Punjab. According to the Deputy Economic and Statistical Advisor, Sangrur the area of the Sangrur is 3,61,452 Hectare. [8] For the administrative purpose, Sangrur is divided into six Tehsils viz., Sangrur, Sunam, Malerkotla, Lehra, Moonak, and Dhuri. After the division of district into six Tehsils, these Tehsils are further divided into ten Blocks. These divisions are for the administrative purposes. The decentralization of district into Tehsils and Blocks increases the participation of people into the affairs of district.

Table 1. Breakup of the Population of Sangrur District.

Place of Residence	Sex	Total Population
Total	Person	1,655,169
	Male	878,029
	Female	777,140
Rural	Person	1,139,204
	Male	604,653
	Female	534,551
Urban	Person	515,965
	Male	273,376
	Female	242,589

Sources: Census of India, 2011

The study about the level of political awareness among rural women is collected from the four villages of Sangrur District. These four villages are Balad Khurd, Sangheri, Baran and Bhutal Kalan. To get the wide, in-depth information the study is collecting information in three aspects.

This study is broadly classified into three parts. The first is to understand the social, economic, political and educational profile of the women respondent. The next part is to analysis the level of political awareness among these women and the last portion deals with the participation level of these women in the political processes.

In the profile of respondents, general information about the age, qualification, occupation, martial statues, caste and religion was collected. The age wise study shows there were the majority of 18-40 years old respondents. 36 percent of

respondents belong to 18-30 age groups. There were 38 percent respondents who belonged to the 31- 40 age groups. The portion of 41-50 age groups was 13 percent. The remaining 13 percent were of 51 to above age. Thus the analysis says that the young rural women were in majority. The caste wise analysis of the studied respondents indicates that 49 percent of respondents were of general caste. General caste includes the jatt Sikh community. There were 42 percent of Scheduled Castes (SCs) which includes the Ramadasia Sikh, Balmikis, Ghuamr, Mazabi Sikh and Gadoria caste. There is 9 percent representation of Other Backward Classes (OBC). There is no representation of Scheduled Tribes (STs). Thus the general caste and STs Respondents are the main. The data analysis regarding the martial statues of respondent's shows that 55 percent women are married and 43 percent women are unmarried. 2 percent women are divorcee. Thus the married women are in majority.

The data regarding the level of education shows that the 23 percent women are illiterates, 16 percent studied up to the elementary level, 17 percent women passes metric, 13 percent women studied till the plus two. 15 percent women were graduated and 16 percent women were post graduated. The occupation wise study shows that mostly women are house holder. 42 percent women are house holder. 32 percent women are students who are studying at the college and university level. 18 percent women are agricultural labours who are going to work in the fields. 4 percent women are on government job and remaining 4 percent are self employee, doing private jobs.

Information is essential for awareness. But there are limited sources of information for women. Study shows that out of the 100 rural women only 29 read newspaper. The women who read the newspaper mostly of them are interested to read the news related to social issues such as the incidents happened in the society related to theft robbery, Dowry etc. Only few women give preference to read political news and political updates. The newspaper they read includes Ajit, Jagbani, Spokesman, Punjabi Tribune, Such Kahun etc. 71 respondents do not read newspaper and mostly of them have no access to newspaper. Therefore it can be said that there are only 29% of the rural women who read the newspaper. Today in the age of technology, social media is the main source of the awareness. But the study shows that leaving a few women mostly rural women have no access to social media. Out of 100 respondents, only 24 women use mobile phones and have access to social media. They used the social app Whatsapp only. Apart from the whatsapp they also used facebook, instagram sometimes, but from these users mostly used these applications only for social contacts not for any information. Most of the respondents are students. On the other hand 76 respondents do not have any access to social media.

Party affiliation or the party attachment is the main source of politicisation. Out of the 100 respondents, 58 rural women do not belong to any political party and they cast their vote to that political party which has more influence on the people and has a majority. 4 respondents told that they belongs to political party

and cast their vote to the same party from the long time. The major parties they belong are SAD, INC, AAP etc. The voting behaviour is also considered as the milestone of the political awareness. Democracy gives the opportunity to select their representatives as per your own wish. But the story is different in the case of women, especially in rural women. Study shows that only 32 women voters out of 100 cast their vote as per their own wish 68 percent of respondents told that they do not cast their vote as per their own wish or their preferred candidate. There are many factors of influence while casting the vote for the rural women. Out of the 100 rural women 32 responded that that they cast their vote to their favourite candidate and according to their wish. But majority of women said that 62 told that they always vote according to the family benefits and in family it is husband or father-in-law or son or to any male member decides to whom cast the vote. 6 respondents told that they cast their vote in keeping community the mind. Therefore only 32 cast their vote according to their own wish.

The level of awareness among the rural women regarding the name of concerned legislative assembly constituency and the name of the concerned member of legislative assembly is very low. Only 16 women out of 100 told the correct name of the legislative assembly constituency. 22 women know the correct name of their concerned member of legislative assembly. 84 women gave the incorrect answer regarding the name of the

legislative assembly concerned and 78 women do not know the name of the MLA of their constituency. Only 16 women out of 100 told the correct name of the Lok Sabha constituency. 22 women know the correct name of their concerned Member of Parliament. 84 women gave the incorrect answer regarding the name of the Lok Sabha concerned and 78 women do not know the name of the MP of their constituency.

The level of awareness about the 33% reservation for women in Panchayat under the Punjab Panchayati Raj Act 1994 among the rural women is an average. Out of 100 samples only 22 respondent told that they know that there is some seats are reserved for the women in Panchayat and they are the those respondents who have been the Panchayat member or at present they are Panchayat members. 78 respondents have no knowledge about the 33% reservation for women in the Panchayats. It is interesting that no women know about the structure, functions and participation in Gram Sabha. Almost all the women mixed up the Gram Sabha with the Gram Panchayat and they do not know the difference between the structure and functioning of these two institutions. Because of the ignorance about the structure and functions of Gram Sabha, they do not participate in the meetings of it also. So there is 0% awareness about the Gram Sabha among the studied women under this survey.

Table 2. Patterns of Political Awareness among Rural Women.

Sr. No.	Question	Option	No. of Respondents	Total
1.	Do you read Newspaper?	Yes	29	29%
		No	71	71%
		Total	100	100%
2.	Do you have access to social Media like facebook, whatsapp etc.?	Yes	24	24%
		No	76	76%
		Total	100	100%
3.	Are you aware about the 33% reservation for women under Panjab PRIs Act 1994?	Yes	22	22%
		No	78	78%
		Total	100	100%
	Have you any knowledge about the structure, functions and meetings of the Gram Sabha?	Yes	-	-
		No	100	100%
		Total	100	100%
4.	Do you know the Name of your legislative Assembly constituency?	Yes	16	16%
		No	84	84%
		Total	100	100%
5.	Name of the MLA	Yes	22	22%
		No	78	78%
		Total	100%	100%
6.	Name of Lok Sabha Constituency	Yes	14	14%
		No	86	86%
		Total	100	100%
7.	Name of the MP	Yes	19	
		No	81	
		Total	100	
8.	Do you cast your vote as per your own wish?	Yes	32	32%
		No	68	68%
		Total	100	100%
9.	Reasons of influence while casting the vote?	Reasons of influence	No. of respondents	Percentage
		Family	62	62%
		Community	06	06%
		Voluntary organisations	-	-
		Own decision	32	32%
		Total	100	100%

Source: Through Personal Interview

Study was conducted to know about the political participation of rural women. Out of 100 rural women only 14 women have the experience of the Panchayat members. Any of the studied women in survey has not been ever elected as the M. P. or MLA. They become the Panchayat member only when the seat is reserved for the women candidate. They have not ever been elected in the non-reserved seat at the Panchayat level. Not even a single woman participates in the meetings of gram Sabha as well as gram Panchayat.

But there is a participation of rural women in the people's

organisations such as student organisation, women organisation, peasant organisation, labour organisation. There are 6 respondents who belong to student organisation and 12 women respondents have member of labour organisation *KMPU*. 82 respondents do not belong to any people's organisation. Therefore, there is an average participation of rural women in the people's organisation or unions. Majority of the respondents has not ever participate in activities such as rallies, dharnas, strikes, demonstrations etc. only 28 respondents they were mostly those who participate in this type of active politics.

Table 3. Political Participation of Rural Women.

Sr. No.	Question	Option	No. of respondents	Total
1.	Do you cast your vote?	Yes	100	100%
		No	-	-
		Total	100	100%
2.	Did you ever contest election?	Yes	14	14%
		No	86	86%
		Total	100	100%
3.	Do you participate in the meetings of Gram Sabha?	Yes	-	-
		No	100	100%
		Total	100	100%
4.	Do you belong to any political party?	Yes	42	42%
		No	58	58%
		Total	100	100%
5.	Do you member of any people's organisation such as labour, student, peasant, women etc.?	Yes	18	18%
		No	82	82%
		Total	100	100%
6.	Do you participate in any type of activities such as rallies, dharnas, strikes, demonstrations etc.?	Yes	28	28%
		No	72	72%
		Total	100	100%

Source: Through Personal Interview.

Democracy has been variously conceived as both as political status, an ethical concept, and a social condition. Thus, Gadding treats democracy as not only a form of government, but also a form of state, a form or condition of society, or a combination of all three. But a normal condition is the coincidence of the three; that is, if society is democratic in its social and economic life, it will be democratic politically on the other hand, if it is sharply differentiated into social classes, it is likely to have a government based, in part at least, upon recognition of special privileges of the upper classes. [9] Today we have noticed different acts of legislature and scheme of central as well as state government to empower women in India but they are still discriminated at every level of society where it is social, political or social participation. [10]

5. Factors of Low Awareness and Participation

There are numberless reasons of the ignorance among women about politics. Infect, the society which is divided on basis of class, gender and caste, cannot maintain the equal level of awareness among its members. On the basis of study, following reasons and challenges have been pointed out in

the path of the political awareness of women.

- The first and foremost reason of less political awareness among women is the sociological reason. The structure of our society is feudal and patriarchal in which the woman is treated as the second sex. She is not considered as a political animal. It is considered that she is not capable for the political activities. This mind set up is so strong that even women think about themselves so.
- There is little public space for women as men have dominated the political arena as well as in public domain for many years in India. Discriminatory attitudes apparent in the limitations presented to women including low access to information and resources. Women rely on receiving information from family or village members, typically men about the politics and other issues.
- Women also lack leadership experience due to the fact they are burdened with household duties and work. The burden of household duties is a significant reason that why many women do not participate. Unlike men, there are fewer opportunities for women to get involved in political parties, pressure groups and other organizations to gain leadership skills.
- Women are hesitated to join politics. Money and

muscle power became the backbone of Indian political system. It has corrupted and polluted.

- v. In carrying on responsibilities illiteracy is a barrier to women. When women in politics are illiterate they are under pressure of their husbands and other members of the family and neighbourhood. This is the major problem in the process of awareness. Education gives her an opportunity to move outside the home and to stand on one's own outside of it, it is also connected to the ability of women to meet and collaborate with other women.
- vi. Women are not in position of taking major decisions, due to the social, economical, psychologically, educational reasons.
- vii. Lethargic and negative attitude of government political parties and other organizations towards leadership of women. They are neglected by the male dominated feudal administration.
- viii. Discrimination is further perpetuated by caste. Dalit women, of the lowest caste in India, are continually discriminated against in running for public office. The Government of India requires reservation of seats for Dalits and STs, but women suffer from abuse and discrimination when serving as elected officials. Even today ill-treatment is faced by SC, ST women in the meetings and representations of social organizations, Panchayats and legislative bodies.
- ix. There are also psychological reasons of less awareness. Political awareness and participation in political parties and organizations or in general, political behaviour itself is the outcome of an individual's total personality. Democratic participation requires confidence in one's own ability and a feeling of self esteem. These are psychological traits. These psychological orientations develop in a given social and cultural environment. Socialization through family, group, political contacts, educational and social institutions exerts immense influence on child. The interplay of sociological and psychological resources in women leads to awareness & shapes their participatory attitude in politics. The main reason of low participation of women in India in general or in the area of study in particular is the lack of interest of women in politics, psychologically it being understood as a domain of man. The stereotype socialization of women creates more interest in the domestic sphere & less in public sphere.

6. Conclusion

Political awareness and an effective participation in politics are determined more by the psychological factors

rather than sociological, yet both factors are interdependent. The psychological involvement is not constant despite the constant sociological factors in a place at a given time, as it depends on the environmental factors. Although women are considerably politically aware, yet the extent of their participation in political activities is considerably less. This points out that although women are politically aware to a larger extent due to the process of socialization, yet there seems to be an absence of psychological resources motivating them to political participation. This was revealed during the oral interaction with women, as they showed their incapacity in being either members of political parties or participating rallies or campaigning activity as it is still looked upon as a 'man's domain'. The reasons of this type less political participation feudal values of the society. The patriarchal nature of society is a hurdle in the process of political socialization of women. So there is a need to smash this type of the structure of the society by the collective activism to ensure their awareness as well as the equal participation on the political processes and for the overall emancipation of women.

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