
CHAPTER – VI

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF DALITS IN NAWANSHEHAR AND PATIALA

In Indian society virtually the higher echelons of power are dominated by the upper castes. Despite the prominence of a few Dalits who have gained high political positions in our country, the political status of Dalits has changed much less than what the individual successes show.

Discrimination on the grounds of caste is morally, legally and democratically wrong. But caste equality can come about only when Dalits make use of the full array of political weapons available to them to achieve it, that is political activity is essential to the struggle for Dalits' liberation.

Political participation takes several forms and varies in spirit in different countries and in different constituencies within a country. As stated in the introductory chapter, political participation refers to these acts intended to influence the behaviour and actions of political decision makers and it embraces various activities designed to achieve this end.³⁰ It is intended to influence the choice of political leaders and the choice of public policies. The levels of participation are not uniformly distributed

throughout the population. Various studies have shown that political participation is directly related to class or income level, educational qualifications, occupational status, caste and religion³⁰. It has also been associated with a variety of other factors.

Lester, W. Milbrath³⁰ (1965), on the basis of a study of recruitment patterns among local party officials in the United States, has suggested four levels of political participation. The first level consists of "Apathetics" who are literally unaware of the political situation around them. They do not even vote or show any interest in voting. Some studies, however, show that non-voting or non-participation arises from many causes and has many different implications for the political system. Non-voting, in fact, may be a participatory act-an act of protest or in effect a negative decision³⁰. An Indian study of 1972 Assembly elections in Bihar has also indicated this aspect of non-voting³⁰. The second level of participation is formed by those who are involved in "spectator activities". This corresponds to what Angus Campbell has called "the peripheral voters"³⁰ They may have some interest in politics and some knowledge about it but their participation does not go beyond the activities of voting. The third level is composed of those involved in transitional activities which include attending a political meeting, participating in campaign activities or making a

contribution to a political party. The final level consists of those who enter the political arena and participate in "gladiatorial activities" such as standing for and holding public and party offices.

Levels of political participation of Indian electorate have been analyzed by Bashiruddin Ahmad³⁰ (1971). He has taken into account the involvement of the electorate in thirteen political activities which ranges from voting to raising money for a party and/or a candidate. On this basis, he has suggested five levels of participation or group voters, viz. Apathetic, Peripherals, Spectators, Auxiliaries and Politists. The first, second and the fifth levels correspond almost exactly to the same levels used by American scholars (Palmer, 1975). The other two levels form the third group "Transitional activities" of Milbrath. According to Ahmad, 'Spectators' are those who only vote and have interest and information as well as those who vote with moderate level of motivation and engage in some other activity. Auxiliaries embrace those who vote and engage in one or two other activities with medium levels of interest and information. According to his estimate, nearly 12% of Indian electorate are high Politists. Auxiliaries and high Politists, according to him, are the groups in

the electorate to which special attention will have to be given. "It is these two groups constituting about 29% of the electorate, who together shape and influence political outcomes."³⁰

Political participation is a process of growth of citizenship. The main thrust in Dalits' participation is how far they have assumed the role of citizens beyond their traditional roles and to what extent such a role has been legitimized to the political structure. Participation of the Dalits in politics is so much important that social movements, Dalit movements for Dalits' rights started with a demand for equality in caste based structure. The right is considered to be essential in the present-conditions for entering the caste dominated society of political decision making. The right to vote and reservation in political posts provides an individual with an important indirect opportunity to be the ruler of his own fate.

In India, the nationalist movement, social movements, Dalit movements and the Indian Constitution all have a deep influence on Dalits' political participation. The role of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi and Kanshi Ram is worth mentioning in this context. They all put emphasis on bringing Dalits from the caste bondage to active politics.

It is often held that political participation is the index of democracy. The higher the terms of participation, the healthier is the democratic system. Participation is a process which associates individuals with the political system. In a society where certain groups are traditionally lagging behind the others, where they can be categorized as the weaker section or disadvantaged group wider participation and mobilization at higher levels is necessary for their upliftment and that in turn is healthier for the democratic system.³⁰

Most of the people participate in politics during the election period. But participation through voting is only seasonal and cannot bring out the total significance of political participation. Participation in between the election period could be much more significant. Although the volume of participation is great in elections, electoral participation is not equal to voting which in addition to voting includes other participation such as attending election meetings, campaigning in the election or collecting funds etc.

The extent of participation has been analyzed here in two parts - in terms of voting participation and in terms of political participation other than voting. Since all acts are but a sub set of the same phenomenon, knowing about a person's participation in

one activity enables us to assess at least to some extent how far he/she is likely to participate in another activity. Those persons who participate in the most demanding form of participation will probably also participate in the less demanding ways. For example, it may be expected that a person who has taken an active part particularly in campaigning would also cast his/her vote.³⁰

As this chapter attempts to gauge the level of political awareness and political participation of the Dalit respondents numbering 300 from two districts of Punjab, a number of variables were selected. On the basis of the responses the analysis is given below :

Level of Political Awareness

(i) Respondents' Interest in Politics

To begin with it is important to know how far the respondents have an interest in politics. Accordingly they were asked to indicate their interest in the political affairs. An effort was made to assess the intensity of political interest of the respondents on the basis of their answers.

Table 6.1
Respondents' Interest in Politics

Interest in Politics	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	63 (42.0)	54 (36.0)	117 (39.0)
No	87 (58.0)	96 (64.0)	183 (61.0)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (200.0)

Not everybody is interested in politics; the majority of our respondents (61%) expressed that they had no interest in politics. Mostly people get interested in politics only during election times; and lesser number of people take occasional interest apart from elections. In our sample only 39% of the respondents displayed interest in politics.

It may be expected that younger people would have a higher degree of interest in politics. But the researcher has found no uniform pattern of relationship between age and interest in politics. Still it has been noticed in this study that interest in politics sharply declined from the age group of 60 and above. This

observation may be interpreted in the light of personal comments of some of the respondents. Some elderly people appeared to have lost their interest in politics possibly due to the fact that they found hardly any resemblance between the professed ideologies and the actual politics of the existing political parties. But the young people appeared to be more guided by practice than by ideologies and, therefore, they were found to be more interested in politics compared to the aged people. In the context of female respondents the degree of interest was found to be much lower than in the case of the male respondents.

(ii) Knowledge About M.P. and M.L.A. of the Area

To test of the political awareness of respondents they were asked very simple questions. For example, they were asked the names of the candidates in previous Lok Sabha polls, the name of the MP and MLA of their area and their respective party affiliation. The responses are given in the following three tables viz. Table No. 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4.

Table 6.2
Knowing the Name or Party of M.P. of the Area

Know the Name or Party of M.P.	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	34 (22.7)	49 (32.7)	83 (27.7)
No	116 (77.3)	101 (67.3)	217 (72.3)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

Table 6.3
Knowing the Name or Party of MLA of the Area

Know the Name or Party of MLA	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	93 (62.0)	120 (80.0)	213 (71.0)
No	57 (38.0)	30 (20.0)	87 (29.0)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

Table 6.4
Knowing the Name of BSP Candidate of the Area

Know the Name of BSP Candidate	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	15 (10.0)	83 (55.3)	98 (32.7)
No	135 (90.0)	67 (44.7)	202 (67.3)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

It has been observed that only 27.7% of the respondents were well informed on the question of MP, while majority of the respondents did not have any knowledge about this.

On the other hand, in case of information about MLA's, majority of the total respondents (71%) were well informed. Only 29 per cent of the respondents did not know the name of their local M.L.A. Similarly, about the BSP candidate of the area, only 32.7 per cent of the overall respondents knew. Thus, it is clear that more respondents knew about the MLA of their area than the M.P. The reasons for this are not far to see; first, the electorate are more directly concerned with the MLA than with MP in terms of development benefits and political patronage. Secondly, the area of an MLA's constituency, is smaller than that of an MP's constituency. The campaigning tends to be concentrated and consequently more intensive in the former than in the latter which in turn accounts for greater knowledge about MLAs than the MPs. Finally, it is normally through the MLAs, that MPs do their campaign, unless of course, a certain candidate for Parliament is so important as his/her umbrella may help the MLA's in their political campaign.³⁰

(iii) Perception Towards Dalit Issues

The Dalit respondents were asked to give their opinion to a basic issue i.e. whether the Dalits should participate actively in politics or not.

Table 6.5
Participation of Dalits in Politics

Should Participate	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	83 (55.3)	88 (58.7)	171 (57.0)
No	31 (20.7)	25 (16.7)	56 (18.7)
According to situation	23 (15.3)	28 (18.7)	51 (17.0)
No idea	13 (8.7)	9 (6.0)	22 (7.3)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

Interestingly a majority of them (57% overall) agreed to the idea of participation. Around 20 per cent from both the districts did not think it necessary where as some felt that it depended on the

situation. A small percentage did not have any idea. Not much difference was found in the responses from the two districts.

In order to understand the awareness level of the respondents more specifically, they were asked to record their opinion on the question of the Dalits having a separate party.

Table 6.6
Should Dalits have a Party

Dalit should have a Party	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	135 (90.0)	132 (88.0)	267 (89.0)
No	15 (10.0)	18 (12.0)	33 (11.0)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

When asked if the Dalits should have a separate party almost all the respondents in both the districts nodded positively. Only a miniscule number felt that there was no need to have any political party separately for them.

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is an important player in Indian politics. In addition to having been the ruling party in Uttar Pradesh, it play a crucial role in national politics also. Punjab which has the highest concentration of Dalit population in the country also has Bahujan Samaj Party which has not been able to make use of the Dalit support base to make a mark in the state's politics. However, it claims to be the only political party representing the interests of the Dalits in the state.

Table 6.7
Respondents' Knowledge about the Party of the Dalits

Knowledge About the Party of Dalits	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	69 (46.0)	84 (56.0)	153 (51.0)
No	81 (54.0)	66 (44.0)	147 (49.0)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

Regarding the knowledge of the Dalits about the existence of their separate party, it was found that only around 50 per cent of the respondents were aware of it. In Nawanshehar, Dalit

respondents were better aware of the existence of their separate party than the Dalit respondents from Patiala district. The rest of the respondents did not know anything about the existence of any special political party of the Dalits, which points to their low level of political awareness.

Further it is important to state that all those who knew about the Bahujan Samaj Party as a party of the Dalits, were not found to be satisfied with its working. In fact almost more than two third stated that they were dissatisfied with the working of the so called Dalit party. Only a few respondents were satisfied with its working.

Political Participation of Dalit Respondents

As active political participation does not mean only voting but includes a number of activities like taking part in election campaign and contesting election, and having political discussions etc. The respondents were asked a number of questions related to all these aspects of political participation.

Type of Political Participation

First of all the respondents were asked to name themselves the type of activity in which they participated. Table No. 6.8 shows their responses.

Table 6.8
Type of Political Participation of Respondents

Type of Political Participation	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Only Voting	135 (90.0)	129 (86.0)	264 (88.0)
Campaign	43 (28.7)	37 (24.7)	80 (26.7)
Contesting elections	21 (14.0)	18 (12.0)	39 (13.0)
No participation	4 (2.7)	3 (2.0)	7 (2.3)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

Out of 300 respondents (both districts taken together), an overwhelming majority of 88 per cent participated only by voting in election, whereas 26.7 per cent were found to be participating in election campaigns. Thirteen per cent of the respondents also contested elections. The corresponding figures in case of Patiala-Nawanshehar were 90 per cent and 86 per cent (only voting), 28.7 per cent and 24.7 per cent (campaigning) and 14 per cent and 12 per cent (contesting elections) respectively.

I. Voting

The first question that faces a citizen at the time of an election is whether he should exercise his franchise or not. For many individuals the act of casting his/her vote is the only important occasion for political activity. The act of voting may bring to some people satisfaction in the sense that through voting they feel to be part of the political system, and think that their contribution to the system is of vital importance. Many people regard voting to be so important that they would not dream of staying away from the polling stations. There are some people who have no such strong feelings about voting. Their decision could be tilted this way or that way by some minor factors. Many people vote merely because their friends, relatives and family members also exercise their franchise that is, primarily as an imitative activity. Again there are some who think that the time spent at the polling station is sheer wastage.³⁰

Table 6.9
Respondents' Voting in Last Elections

Voted	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	135 (90.0)	129 (86.0)	264 (88.0)
No	15 (10.0)	21 (14.0)	36 (12.0)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

As seen from the Table 6.9 the majority of the respondents cast their vote in the last elections. This indicates the respondents' enthusiasm for voting. Only 12 per cent respondents did not cast their vote. Some of the reasons reported by the respondents behind not casting their vote were apathy towards voting and being busy in their other jobs.

In order to know what does the voter have in mind while casting the vote the respondents were asked to recall what they had uppermost in their mind while voting : Party, candidate, caste or religion. The responses are tabulated below.

Table 6.10
Factors Influencing Voting

Voted on the Basis of	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Party	86 (63.7)	79 (61.2)	165 (62.5)
Candidates	35 (25.9)	35 (27.1)	70 (26.5)
Caste	9 (6.7)	7 (5.4)	16 (6.1)
Religion	5 (3.7)	8 (6.2)	13 (4.9)
Total	135 (100.0)	129 (100.0)	264 (100.0)

On the basis of data it seems that 70 out of three hundred (26.5%) respondents had the candidate in mind while voting. Only a small percentage of them i.e. 6.1 percent and 4.9 percent kept the caste and religion in mind respectively. But the large majority of the respondents (62.5%) had the party in mind. This is inevitable because the voters are trained that way. The propaganda is conducted in terms of party more than in term of candidate and religion or caste. It is also convenient for the voters. The voters take less time to find out the symbol of a party at the time of polling. To

find out the name is also difficult for many because of illiteracy. But the symbols of parties are prominently printed on the ballot paper and during electioneering the campaigners make efforts to bring home to the respondents' mind the symbol of the party rather than any other thing.

In studies on political behaviour in India, it has been observed that high status people play an important role in shaping the political attitude of Dalits. Impact on a person during and on the day of voting is necessary to identify.

Table 6.11
Pressure on Respondents' During Elections

Pressure on Respondents	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Of Upper Castes	42 (31.1)	28 (21.7)	70 (26.5)
Of Family Member	45 (33.3)	53 (41.1)	98 (37.1)
No Pressure	48 (35.6)	48 (37.2)	96 (36.4)
Total	135 (100.0)	129 (100.0)	264 (100.0)

Upper caste influence on Dalits' voting behaviour is evident from the table given above. 26.5 per cent respondents admitted that they voted as per the wishes of higher castes. 37.1 per cent respondents reportedly cast their vote according to their family wishes. The family head enjoys a high status and exerts a dominant influence on the family. The family head guides the political behaviour of the members. Mostly women are under this category. It has been noted that for married women, the important influential males are their husbands, while for single women, fathers play important role in opinion change.³⁰ It is interesting to note that, in principle, most of the respondents agreed with the proposition that the right to vote should be exercised by Dalits in absolute freedom, but in practice most of respondents admitted that Dalits are influenced mostly by the upper caste members or by their own family members. This gap between professed ideal and actual belief is a great obstacle to the participation of the Dalits in politics.

Table 6.12
Respondents' Interest in Election Results

Interest in Election Results	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	42 (28.0)	53 (35.3)	95 (31.7)
No	108 (72.0)	97 (64.7)	205 (68.3)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

Table 6.12 distributes the voters as per their interest in political results. Though election results are keenly watched and discussed by the people in general but out of our sample only 31.7 per cent of the respondents reported to have shown interest in election results and the rest of the respondents i.e. 68.3 per cent stated that they had no interest in such results.

As stated earlier, though voting is the most viable form of participation there are other important forms of participation as well. It is essential to find out the participation of Dalits in other political fields because voting turn out alone cannot explore the effective and genuine participation of Dalits as a whole. So, an

attempt has been made to examine Dalits' political participation in other fields of the political structure in addition to voting. In order to examine the participation of the respondents in political fields other than voting, they were asked whether they had participated in the election campaign, contested any election, discussed politics, attended political meetings etc. Here, only the actual voters have been taken into consideration that is those who did not exercise their vote have been excluded. It must be kept in mind that the number of respondents who did not vote is extremely small.

ii. *Participation in Election Campaign*

Campaign is an essential part of the election process. We cannot dream of any election in any country being held today without any campaign at all. Intensity and extent of campaign may certainly differ from one country to another and one occasion to another. But there is always some electioneering prior to the polling and in Punjab like the rest of India campaign is done quite rigorously.

Table 6.13
Respondents' Participation in Election Campaign

Participation in Election Campaign	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	37 (24.7)	43 (28.7)	80 (26.7)
No	113 (75.3)	107 (71.3)	220 (73.3)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

As far as the participation in election campaign of the Dalit respondents is concerned, the Table 6.13 shows that overall an overwhelming majority i.e. 73.30% of the respondents did not participate in election campaign and only 26.70% did. District wise, it was seen that in case of Nawanshehar 28.70% respondents were involved in campaigning as compared to Patiala where the proportion was just 24.70 percent. This shows that most of the Dalits do not take an active interest in activities other than voting.

There are a very few people who have not, at one time or another, watched a play of some sort being staged. But this does not mean that all of them, or even most of them, have actively

participated in the staging of the play. The same thing may be said about an election campaign.³⁰ Many of them feel interested in the campaign, but the interest may not be intense enough to lead to participation in the campaign. While it may be true that all of those who participate in the campaign are interested in it, the converse would be fallacious. Interest in campaign and participation in campaign are two distinct things.

We tried to assess the level of participation of our respondents in election campaign. As only 80 respondents out of the total 300 had reportedly participated in the election campaign, they were further ranked according to their involvement in the campaign activities. For further analysis these 80 respondents have been taken who can be referred to as "active respondents". For this purpose we asked the respondents five questions about their role in campaign which were as follows:-

- i) Inspiring the voters.
- ii) Contribution/Collection of election funds.
- iii) Participation/Preparation in election meetings.
- iv) Preparation/Distribution of slips/posters/banners.
- v) Door to door election campaign.

(i) *Inspiring the Voters*

Out of the total 80 respondents from the two districts who participated in election campaign as many as 71(88.8%) claimed that they inspired the voters to vote. The corresponding figures in case of Patiala and Nawanshehar were 32(88.5%) and 39 (90.7%) respectively. Similarly in response to another question regarding inspiring the voters to vote for a specific candidate, almost all the respondents (80) claimed that they were asking/inspiring the voters to vote for their favourite candidate.

Table 6.14

Respondents' Inspiring the Voters

Inspired	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	32 (86.5)	39 (90.7)	71 (88.8)
No	5 (13.5)	4 (9.3)	9 (11.3)
Total	37 (100.0)	43 (100.0)	80 (100.0)

Table 6.15
Respondents' Inspiring the Voters to Vote for a Favourite Candidate

Inspired for a favourite candidate	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	37 (100.0)	43 (100.0)	80 (100.0)
No	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	37 (100.0)	43 (100.0)	80 (100.0)

Thus the data shows that those who were involved in election campaign were not only asking the voters to cast their votes but were also inspiring them to vote for a particular candidate.

(ii) *Contribution/Collection of election funds*

The extension of a helping hand in collection of funds for election campaign of a candidate or party is an important index of the commitment of the electorate. Here it is pertinent to clarify that there are two aspects of "Fund Collection" – firstly contributing or giving funds from ones own pocket and secondly collecting funds

from the other donors. Thus the respondents were asked about both these aspects.

Table 6.16
Respondents Giving Funds for Elections

Give Fund for Election	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	11 (29.7)	12 (27.9)	23 (28.8)
No	26 (70.3)	31 (72.1)	57 (71.3)
Total	37 (100.0)	43 (100.0)	80 (100.0)

Table 6.17
Collection of Funds by Respondents

Collection of Funds	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	18 (48.6)	21 (48.8)	39 (48.8)
No	19 (51.4)	22 (51.2)	41 (51.3)
Total	37 (100.0)	43 (100.0)	80 (100.0)

One may point out in this context that giving election funds is normally done by the influential party elite or the core supporters of an independent candidate and normally the ordinary elector is not involved in this work. This is reflected in Table no. 6.16 & 6.17 as only 28.8% of the active participants answered in affirmative as far as contributing to election funds was concerned. Majority of them did not contribute financially. The percentage of respondents contributing funds for party/candidate is almost the same in both the districts. In fact, many of them were involved in the collection of fund. The Table shows that in both the districts nearly fifty percent of these respondents (80) were involved in raising funds for the party/candidate in both the districts.

(iii) *Participation In Election Meetings*

Election meetings are one of the important modes for approaching the electorate collectively. This is used to inform the electorate about the party, its programme and symbol, as also for introducing the candidates to the electorate. This is also important because it gives an opportunity to the candidate and the party to demonstrate to the rival candidates their strength and the support that they command. It is for this reason that efforts are made to mobilize large number of people to attend a public meeting.

Here again two activities are involved as far as participation in election meeting is concerned. One is that the persons are only attending an election meeting and second is that he or she not only attends the meeting but also plays a role in organizing the election meeting.

Table 6.18
Participation in Election Meetings

Participation in Election Meetings	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	16 (43.2)	22 (51.2)	38 (47.5)
No	21 (56.8)	21 (48.8)	42 (52.5)
Total	37 (100.0)	43 (100.0)	80 (100.0)

Table 6.19
Preparation of Election Meetings

Preparation of Election Meetings	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	13 (35.1)	16 (37.2)	29 (36.3)
No	24 (64.9)	27 (62.8)	51 (63.8)
Total	37 (100.0)	43 (100.0)	80 (100.0)

When the 80 respondents were questioned regarding participation in election meetings they were almost equally divided with a slightly more percentage of those not participating. The overall percentage being 47.3 of those who participated. The percentage of those participating in election meetings was slightly lower in Patiala but Nawanshehar compensated for the lower percentage in Patiala. The corresponding percentage for Nawanshehar and Patiala was 51.2 and 43.2 respectively.

Regarding the preparation of election meetings, the majority of the respondents did not take active part. However, around 35 to 37% of the active respondents claimed to be involved in organizing the election meetings.

(iv) *Preparation/Distribution of Slips/Posters/Banners*

Like public meetings, election posters also play a significant role in popularizing parties, their symbols and their candidates. They are also used by way of drawing caricatures of parties and candidates in opposition. Posters can be appreciated by the literate masses, though their impact is not entirely lost on the illiterate masses also because they can be influenced by the visual impact if not the written word.

Table 6.20**Involvement in Preparation of Posters/Banners**

Preparation of Posters/Banners	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	8 (21.6)	17 (39.5)	25 (31.3)
No	29 (78.4)	26 (60.5)	55 (68.8)
Total	37 (100.0)	43 (100.0)	80 (100.0)

Table 6.21**Distribution of Slips/Poster/Banner for your Favourite Candidate**

Distribution	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	30 (81.1)	35 (81.4)	65 (81.3)
No	7 (18.9)	8 (18.6)	15 (18.8)
Total	37 (100.0)	43 (100.0)	80 (100.0)

As usually the posters/slips and banners are prepared on a large scale by party organization, it is only in case of a few not so rich independent candidates that preparation of this material is done manually by his/her supporters. The Table reflects this as

only a small percentage of the 80 respondents were found to be involved in this, in both the districts.

However most of the "active respondents" are seen taking posters, slips and banners. The table shows that more than 80 per cent of the respondents in both the districts were reportedly involved in this election activity.

(v) *Door To Door Election Campaign*

Participation in door to door campaigning is a more specific activity which perhaps indicates a higher degree of political involvement.

The candidates are expected to do considerable door to door campaigning in order to meet the voters individually. It is visualized that the frequency of such events increases during the latter periods of the election campaign. Further these are carried out mostly during mornings and evenings when voters are expected to be at home. Besides, the candidate, his election workers or supporters also are expected to carry out such campaign. The sample consisting of 80 respondents who reported to have participated in election campaign were asked whether they participated in door to door canvassing on behalf of any candidate or party.

Table 6.22**Respondents' Involvement in Door to Door Election Campaign**

Involvement in Door to Door Election Campaign	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	32 (86.5)	40 (93.0)	72 (90.0)
No	5 (13.5)	3 (7.0)	8 (10.0)
Total	37 (100.0)	43 (100.0)	80 (100.0)

Table 6.22 clearly shows that almost 90 per cent of the active respondents participated in door-to-door campaign. The corresponding figures for Patiala and Nawanshehar were 85.6 and 93.0 per cent respectively. This shows that Nawanshehar respondents had a slight edge here as around 7 per cent more respondents in Nawanshehar participated in door-to-door campaign as compared to the respondents in Patiala.

Thus the above few Tables showing the participation/ involvement of the "active respondents" (80 out of the total sample of 300) help us in drawing the conclusion that the participation of most of them is confined to attending the meetings, collecting the

funds for the elections, distribution of campaign material and more to door to door campaign. Very few of them contributed to party funds or participated in preparation of banners, organized the election meetings and participated in preparation of campaign material. The scenario did not differ much in the two districts.

III. *Interaction with Mass Media*

Apart from studying the problem of political participation an effort was made to assess the influence of different communication modes on the minds of the respondents. In fact, the communication media (both print and electronic) in the past two decades has gained tremendous significance in influencing the attitudinal pattern of the individuals throughout the world. Beginning with newspapers, films and radio, then with television and presently with satellites and other sophisticated delivery systems, modern communication system has been thrust in to almost every corner of the world.³⁰ Lerner regards the developments of the mass media as the key in a society's march from a state of traditionalism to that of modernity. ³⁰ It may be expected that a rise in media exposure would be accompanied by a corresponding impact on the attitudinal pattern of the respondents.

(i) ***Interest in Political News:***

Three questions regarding political news were - whether they were interested in political news or not, second, what was the source of collecting the news and third, did they discuss the political issues with others.

Table 6.23
Respondents' Interest in Political News

Degree of Interest	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
High	66 (44.0)	77 (51.3)	143 (47.7)
Moderate	43 (28.7)	36 (24.0)	79 (26.3)
No Interest	41 (27.3)	37 (24.7)	78 (26.0)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

As far as the responses to the query about interest in political news is concerned the table 6.23 reveals that out of total respondents 47 per cent were found to have a high degree of interest in political news whereas 26 per cent were having a moderate interest in this type of news. As many as 26 per cent were found to be totally uninterested in political news. Out of the two districts under study, the level of interest in political news was

found to be slightly higher in the Dalit respondents of Nawanshehar.

In identifying the source of political news, the respondents gave a variety of answers which is tabulated ahead.

Table 6.24
Respondents' Mode of Collecting Political News

Mode of Collecting Political News	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Television	55 (36.7)	52 (34.7)	107 (39.6)
Party Magazine	3 (2.0)	5 (3.3)	8 (3.0)
Party Members	12 (8.0)	14 (9.3)	26 (9.6)
Newspaper	29 (19.3)	25 (16.7)	54 (20.0)
Radio	51 (34.0)	54 (36.0)	105 (38.9)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

The above Table clearly demonstrates that an overall majority of the respondents were dependent on Television and Radio (39.6 and 38.9%) for getting political news. 20% of the respondents were found to be more interested in reading newspapers. 9% of the respondents gathered the news from party members whereas a few (just 3%) stated to be knowing it from party magazine. The scenario in two districts was almost the same with slight variations.

(ii) Discussion of Political Issues

Conversation is a good pastime of people in India, more so in the rural area. In rural areas gossip and conversation, that is, person to person or face to face dialogue is a very common pattern of communication of ideas, news, information, knowledge, and opinion.

Political discussions have a place of their own in a democracy. Besides, the family, there are friends and community members with whom a voter might discuss the elections. These groups might determine the political attitudes and influence voting decisions, because the individual look to them for guidance.

Table 6.25
Political Discussion with Friends or Family Members

Political Discussion with Others	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	35 (23.3)	45 (30.0)	80 (26.7)
On Special Occasions	52 (34.7)	48 (32.0)	100 (33.3)
No	63 (42.0)	57 (38.0)	120 (40.0)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

If the responses to the question about discussing political matters with their friends and family members are analysed, the

data reveals that only 26.7% of the overall respondents answered in positive. 33.3 per cent of the respondents indulged in political discussions only on special occasions. 40 per cent of the total respondents did not take part in political discussions with the family members or with the other members of the community. Thus it may be inferred that a substantial number of Dalits in the two districts avoided indulging in political discussions. The corresponding figure of those taking part in political discussions in case of Patiala and Nawanshehar are 23.3 per cent and 30 per cent respectively. 34.7 per cent in Patiala and 32 per cent in Nawanshehar come in the category of those discussing political issues only on special occasions. These special occasions usually are the times of elections.

iv Party Membership/Preference of Party or Leaders

Political participation takes place at different forms and levels. Voting, as stated earlier, is the most explicit mode of this which is undertaken by all or most of the citizens. However, party membership could be taken as indicative of active participation in politics.³⁰ The membership of all the parties, in India, is more or less liberally granted. Such membership demands merely the payment of a small annual subscription and a written acceptance of the principles of the party concerned. Under the existing rules, government servants and servants of semi governmental

organizations are prohibited from becoming members of political parties.³⁰

Table 6.26
Membership of any Political Party

Membership	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	37 (24.7)	47 (31.3)	84 (28.0)
No	113 (75.3)	103 (68.7)	216 (72.0)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

Regarding the question of membership of any political party, only 37 out of the total 150 respondents from Patiala responded in positive which comes out to be only 24.70 per cent and the rest of the respondents (113) were not having membership of any political party. The corresponding figures for Nawanshehar were 47 (31.3%) and 103 (68.7%) respectively. At aggregate level of the two districts, only 28 per cent respondents were found to be having political membership, whereas the majority (72%) of the respondents did not have membership of any political party.

When the respondents having party membership were further asked about holding any party office, it was found that in Patiala district, only one person was secretary of Shiromani Akali Dal at the block level. In Nawanshehar district out of the 47 party holders, one was found to be holding the office of secretary of CPM at district level and another was President of CPM at block level.

To further probe the interest and level of their involvement the respondents were asked to pick their favourite politician out of a list of some prominent political leaders of state. They were also asked to name the party which addressed the Dalit issues.

Table 6.27
Respondents' Favourite Politician

Name of Politician	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Captain Amrinder Singh (Congress I)	95 (63.3)	77 (51.3)	172 (57.3)
Parkash Singh Badal (SAD) (B)	31 (20.7)	29 (19.3)	60 (20.0)
Simranjeet Singh Maan (SAD) (M)	1 (0.7)	3 (2.0)	4 (1.3)
Balwant Singh Ramuwalia (LBP)	1 (0.7)	1 (0.7)	2 (0.7)
Avtar Singh Karimpuri (BSP)	13 (8.7)	19 (12.7)	32 (10.7)

Jagroop Singh (CPI)	2 (1.3)	0 (0.0)	2 (0.7)
Professor Balwant Singh (CPIM)	5 (3.3)	14 (9.3)	16 (5.3)
Mohan Bhandari (BJP)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
No body	2 (1.3)	14 (9.3)	16 (5.3)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

When the respondents, were asked about their favourite politician, majority of the them (57.3%) named captain Amrinder Singh at overall level, followed by Prakash Singh Badal (20.0%) and Avtar Singh Karimpuri (10.7%). The rest of the political leaders viz. S.S. Mann, B.S. Ramuwalia, Prof. Balwant Singh, Jagroop Singh were favoured by a very negligible proportion of the respondents. In Patiala 63.3% of the respondents favoured Captain Amrinder Singh, followed by Parkash Singh Badal (20.7%), Avtar Singh Karimpuri (8.7%). Similarly, in case of Nawanshehar, 51.3% per cent of the respondents favoured Captain Amrinder Singh, followed by Parkash Singh Badal (19.3%). Avtar Singh Karimpuri (19%). One special feature in case of Nawanshehar was that in this district, 9.3% of the respondents out rightly reported having no favourite politician.

The perceptions of the respondents regarding the party raising and protecting Dalit issues are presented in Table 6.28.

Table 6.28
Party Favouring Dalit Issues

Name of the Party	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Congress	76 (50.7)	65 (43.3)	141 (47.0)
BSP	53 (35.3)	47 (31.3)	100 (33.3)
BJP	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
SAD	16 (10.7)	22 (14.7)	38 (12.7)
CPM/CPI	3 (2.0)	11 (7.3)	14 (4.7)
LBP	2 (1.3)	2 (1.3)	4 (1.3)
Any other	0 (0.0)	3 (2.0)	3 (1.0)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

The overall picture of the two districts taken together shows that 47% of the respondents considered Congress to be the party safeguarding their interests more than any other party, followed by BSP (33.3%) and SAD (12.7%). The rest of the political parties were not considered to be caring for problems of Dalits as the number of respondents taking their name was very less. In case of Patiala,

3/4th of the respondents had the perception that Congress was the best bet for them, followed by BSP (35.5%), and SAD (10.7%). In case of Nawanshehar, 43.3 percent of the dalits believed Congress to be safe, followed by BSP (31.3%) and SAD (4.7%). One notable thing emerged that BJP was not considered as a favourite by any of the respondents in both the districts.

v Contesting Elections

Going beyond voting, attending political meetings, participating in election campaigns or becoming members of some political parties, the most active participation is contesting elections at any level-local, state or national. Table No. 6.29 shows the responses of the respondents.

Table 6.29
Respondents Contesting Elections

Contested Election	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	21 (14.0)	18 (12.0)	39 (13.0)
No	129 (86.0)	132 (88.0)	261 (87.0)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

Table 6.30

Elections Contested by the Respondents

Election Contested	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Panchayat	21 (100.0)	17 (94.4)	36 (92.3)
Vidhan Sabha	0 (0.0)	1 (5.6)	1 (7.7)
Lok Sabha	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	21 (100.0)	18 (100.0)	39 (100.0)

When the respondents were asked this question it was found that of the total 300 respondents in the two districts, only 39 (13.0%) had contested elections. Out of this 39, 21 were from Patiala and 18 were from Nawanshehar. Only one respondent had contested the Vidhan Sabha election. None of the respondents from both the districts had ever contested a Parliamentary election. This means that the elections contested were of Panchayat level. This speaks of their low political participation at state or central level. An attempt was also made to know the views of the former and sitting members of the village Panchayats regarding their position in Panchayats as members. They expressed their unhappiness over

the working of the Panchayats and their weak authority vis-à-vis the political executives. Almost every one complained of the interference and dominance of the high caste elites.

vi Perceptions towards Governance

An effort was made to find out the respondents' capability to understand the politics and complications of governance. Table 6.31 presents the responses of our respondents.

Table 6.31
Understanding Government Work

Understanding Government Work	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Understand	25 (16.7)	30 (20.0)	55 (18.3)
Do not Understand	125 (83.3)	120 (80.0)	245 (81.7)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

It is clear from the Table that more than 80 percent of respondents, admitted that government and its working was so complicated that they could not understand what was going on. More respondents (83.3%) in Patiala stated this as compared to respondents (80%) in Nawanshehar. The slight edge of those who understood working of the government in the Nawanshehar is

indicative of the fact that the respondents in Nawanshehar were slightly better aware. Because majority of the respondents did not understand the intricacies of governance, they were not able to talk about the policies or programmes launched by government.

However they still had some opinion about the overall working of the government. As a common man is affected on the day to day basis by the services provided by the government and expects a lot from it, the collective opinion of the public is of great importance in a democracy.

Table 6.32
Respondents' Opinion Towards Government

Opinion Towards Government	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Good	41 (27.3)	37 (24.7)	78 (26.0)
Bad	54 (36.0)	55 (36.7)	109 (36.3)
No Idea	55 (36.7)	58 (38.7)	113 (37.7)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

The stability and continuation of any government depends on the response and support it gets from the public, the opinion of the

respondents was collected regarding the functioning of the government of the day.

When the respondents were asked about the working of government 36.3% found it to be bad as there was a lot of corruption in the administration and the pace of development of the Punjab was low. 26 percent respondents reported the working of government to be good. However, a substantial percentage (37.7%) of respondents did not give their opinion because of lack of awareness. Here also there was not much difference in the perception of respondents from the two districts.

Table 6.33
Impact of Public Opinion on Government

Impact	No. of Respondents (Patiala)	No. of Respondents (Nawanshehar)	Total
Yes	35 (23.3)	29 (19.3)	64 (21.3)
No	67 (47.7)	63 (42.0)	130 (43.3)
No Idea	48 (32.0)	58 (38.7)	106 (35.3)
Total	150 (100.0)	150 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

When the respondents were asked a straight question regarding the impact of public opinion on government, 64 (21.3%) of the 300 respondents agreed that it had an impact on the government while 130 (43.3%) did not agree with the idea. The rest of the respondents 106 (35.3%) remained neutral. Comparing the respondents of the two districts, Patiala had a slight edge over Nawanshehar in considering public opinion as a factor impacting government.

Thus in the present chapter an effort has been made to understand and probe the level of political participation of the Dalits in two districts of Punjab, as it is very important that the Dalits, who constitute a marginalized and oppressed section of Indian society participate actively in the political arena.

Through the ages, oppressed people in different parts of the world have fought for their right to participation in the political process. Participation helps the individual to be effective and it associates him with the political system.

By exercising this right an individual feels that he/she has become the master not only of his/her own fate but also of the fate of his/her fellow beings. The higher the rate and level of political participation, the more varied are its forms and the healthier is the

democratic system, particularly in a society where certain groups are traditionally behind the others.

Our data shows that the interest in politics varies with man's earning capacity. The poor people do not (perhaps cannot afford to) take continuous interest in politics. They are largely apolitical. The well-to-do people are somewhat more interested in politics : indeed a sizeable percentage of them take continuous interest in politics. This is quite understandable. The poor people have to worry more about their immediate needs. They are also uneducated and therefore do not understand the processes of democratic politics. However as far as voting is concerned those who are at the lower level of the society-whether class-wise or caste wise - the majority turns out to vote. In our sample also the majority of the respondents cast their votes though they exercised their right on the advice of family members and influential persons of higher castes. Very few of them exercised their voting right according to their own choice. Most of them were guided by the dictates of the powerful sections of the society. Another similar question as to what they had uppermost in their mind while voting. The large majority of the respondents had the party in mind. This is inevitable because the voters are trained that way. Here it is important to point out that it is so not because they understand

the ideology or performance of the party but because they are persuaded to do so. In fact they are made to remember the party symbol. It is on the basis of such training that they exercise the voting right.

Turning to the participation in political activities other than voting, it has to be noted once again that though most of the respondents voted but they did not take an active part in politics. The low-level of political participation was indicated by the small number of respondents' participation in election campaign and other election activities.

The non-response of the Dalit respondents to many questions was indicative of their low level of political knowledge. It has been observed that only a small number of respondents had knowledge about the political parties and knew the names of the MPs and MLAs of their area. It is further observed that majority of the respondents did not understand the government's working and the policies and programmes of the government.

Today Dalits are present almost in all political parties but only as members. The higher positions are captured by the dominant classes in all parties (except the BSP). We found only 3

Dalit respondents out of our total sample of 300 from two districts holding party offices that also at the block-level.

It has been observed that the Congress party and its leaders occupied a pre-eminent position in the minds of the Dalit respondents. The rest of the political parties or their leaders were not considered to be protecting the interests of Dalits.

Thus on the whole it may be concluded that though the Dalits have been provided with constitutional safeguards and reservations, the common Dalit masses in Punjab are still not making complete use of the opportunities. Only an elite section of the Dalits is reaping the harvest. The poor, marginalized simple Dalit population still has not become politically aware and active. They do turn up of in large numbers for voting but lag behind in other activities of political participation.

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