CHAPTER TWO

Understanding of Politics in Slums: A Theoretical Framework

This chapter attempts to explain the concept of ‘politics in slums’ and also tries to locate the present study into existing theories on slum community life. Slums are assuming an increasingly larger place on this planet. Therefore, it has become very important to understand life in slums from social, political and economic aspects. Many approaches have been developed and employed to study life in the slums, both in academic research and political administration in India. Social scientists have attempted to study slum life in India by working on sociological aspects, cultural aspects, gender perspective, human rights perspective, economic dimension and geographical dimension in slums. All societies have some forms of political life; the complexities with political life vary with society. Slums are the hot spot of any urban city politics. Voting right is an important instrument for slum dwellers to exert their influence on the political society. Slums play the role of the most dependable vote banks for politicians. The political masters use the slum dwellers as vote bank because they are most effective, united and un-demanding lot of voters. They vote in large percentage as they see elections as an opportunity to fulfil their collective demands.

Considering political life as an aspect of slum life, this study attempts to explain the life of urban slum dwellers. Studying politics in slums not only help to understand political life in slums but also appears as an instrument to explore the social and economic dynamics in slums. Mike Davis (2006) has suggested in his study that slum dwellers residing in the margins of the political and social order in the society have huge political potential to affect the organised world order. ⁸⁰ Voluminous amount of literature indicates that the slum dwellers living in urban cities are considered different from middle and upper class people in physical, social, political and economic aspects.⁸¹ On this aspect Tulshi Kumar Das (2000) mentioned

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⁸⁰ Mike Davis mentioned about this political potential of the margins, which might greatly affect the ways in which the world is organized. He has depicted a negative prospect of fear and violence, in which bloody confrontations between slum dwellers and state had been presented. For details See Mike Davis, Planet of Slums (London: Verso Press, 2006), p. 206.

in his study that cultural practices in slums depend on the social structure. Since slums are marginalized in the mainstream urban society, the slum dwellers are alienated from the dominant culture of urban areas and their culture is autonomous.\textsuperscript{82} It is clearly visible that slums in cities have now become a regular feature and part of the contemporary urban areas, but slums have never been accepted as a social and political unit of city. Hunter (1968) in his has defined slum as a social phenomenon in which its characteristics attributes ideas, ideals and practices play an important role. It is the habit, custom, behaviour patterns people have learnt and which they hold that makes them behave in a particular way.\textsuperscript{83} The poor migrants move into the squatters of the city not only physically but also bring along their culture, style of life and values. Koster (2009) in his study also considered slum dwellers as the marginalised sections of the city/society.\textsuperscript{84} Gooptu (2001) sees poor people’s politics as different from other classes. As poor people politics is about everyday problem solving in the locality and a bargaining to secure their individual or collective interest in return for electoral support.\textsuperscript{85}

The slums, although largely excluded from the rest of the city, displays social, economic and political connections to the world outside the slum. Marginalised poor people residing in slums are trying to integrate themselves in to the political and economic order by connecting themselves with outside world.\textsuperscript{86} Ashis Nandy (1998) mentioned in his study that “slums settlements were never part of the formal ‘master plan’ but always implicit in it. Slums provide the cheap labour and services without


\textsuperscript{83} For detail see Hunter, David R. \textit{The Slums: Challenge and Response} (New York: Free Press, 1968), p.45

\textsuperscript{84} According to Koster slums have become part of the contemporary urban landscape, but they have never been accepted socially, politically and economically, slums still exist in the margins See Martijn Koster, \textit{In Fear of Abandonment: Slum Life, Community Leaders and Politics in Recife, Brazil} (Netherlands: Wageningen university press, 2009), p. 21. Also see the existing theories on slums life ‘Culture of Poverty’ and ‘Theory of Marginality’ which consider slum dwellers as marginal’s who are living at the margins of political and economic order.

\textsuperscript{85} Nandini Gooptu, \textit{The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth India} (England: Cambridge University Press, 2001) .p.47.

\textsuperscript{86} As Charles Stokes in his study explained that particular slums which he labelled “slums of hope” were in a process of integration in city life in which its residents would integrate in the labour market and acquire the cultural resources necessary. These slums were, for him, places of passage and transition. Stokes further argued that processes of successful or failed social integration had two dimensions: on the one hand slum dwellers' own efforts and capacities to integrate and on the other hand society's willingness to absorb them. Indeed, in policy debate, understandings of marginalization of slum dwellers have often drawn one-sidedly upon just one dimension. See C. J. Stokes, “A theory of slums,” \textit{Land Economics}, 38 (1962), pp. 187-197.
which the official city could not survive. The existence of this exploited and
disenfranchised other (slum dwellers) cannot be acknowledged by the official city as
part of its self. This huge mass of India’s urban poor appears ‘obsolete’ in the march
of progress.”

The above discussion shows that the life in slum is different from the upper
and middle class therefore, it is predictable that the meaning of politics in slum would
also differ from assumptions and theories of politics reproduced with in formal
and mainstream politics. Life in the slum has its own logics and dynamics therefore
politics in slums needs to be studied from perspective and parameters of slum life
only.

1. Understanding the Concept of Politics in Slums

Anthropological and sociological studies emphasized that the study of local notions
are important to understand life in slums. “The uncertain and insecure circumstances
of life in the slums play an important role in shaping politics in the slums. No doubt
that governmental, electoral and clientelism concepts which are part of mainstream
politics are inseparable part of slum politics, but politics in slums consists of much
more than this. Only applying the logics of external and formal conceptualisations of
politics in studying political life in slums is not enough to analyse the politics in
slums.” Notions like political representation, citizenship, democracy occupies a
common place among upper and middle class but these are not much significant with
the reality in the slum.

Many previous studies on slums of India leans on institutional notions like
political parties, political leadership, policies and schemes of government and
elections to explain political life in slums. Study of Desai and Pillai (1972) mainly

87 Ashis Nandy, “Introduction: Indian Popular Cinema as the Slum’s Eye View of Politics” in The
Secret Politics of Our Desires: Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Cinema, Ashis Nandy

88 Mainstream politics includes the notions like political parties, political alliances, citizenship and
democracy.

89 As shown by the Koster in his study of Recife Brazil slums that External notions like
governmental politics and clientelism are not enough to understand slum politics. that notions like
political parties, participation, political alliances, citizenship, democracy might seem
commonplace in prevailing definitions of politics, are often reproduced by upper and middle class
and not resonant with the reality in the slum. See Martijn Koster, In Fear of Abandonment: Slum
Life, Community Leaders and Politics in Recife, Brazil (Netherlands: Wageningen university
focused on the political participation, political parties (Swatantra Party, Jana Sangh, Shiv Sena and Congress) and the trade unions to explain political aspect in slum in Golibar slums in (Bombay) Mumbai. While explaining political life in slums of Chennanagar, Weibe (1980) has focused on the elections, political parties, elected political leaders and informal associations (Manram). Nandini, Gooptu (2010) in her work of the ‘politics of urban poor’ in Uttar Pradesh primarily explained the politics of poor by studying urban local policies and modes of political actions and perception. Auyero (2001) shows how clientelist practices take place within mutual support networks which include slum dwellers and political brokers. In these mutual support networks, people produce and act upon symbolic representations so as to reproduce given systems of domination. According to him slum dwellers share a wider moral universe with dominant sectors of the political order.

Chatterjee (2004) has developed a new path to understand politics not as pre-political and backward, but as a politics with its own parameters and logics, different from that of the elite. He has primarily seen popular politics as “a politics emerging out of the developmental policies of government aimed at specific population groups’ that disobey the strict boundaries of governmental policy.” According to him in order to obtain resources from the government, the poor have to negotiate and apply pressure in the right places. This would frequently mean the bending or stretching of rules, because existing procedures have historically worked to exclude or marginalize them. He focuses not on the politics of the state apparatus or the government, but on the politics of marginalized people. He argues that this kind of politics should be

91 Wiebe in his study explained that elections are by now an integral part of local life and people are becoming increasingly tied into political networks that extend beyond the borders of the nagar,” Wiebe demonstrate that in Chennanagar Manrams (associations) play a vital role, Manrams in part formally constituted but also with distinctly developing, informally defined roles of their own. These have become platforms in relation to which the people make demands, determine their leadership, find their interest represented and relate themselves to “outside” political figures”. See Paul D Wiebe, Social Life in An Indian Slum (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1975) pp. 104-121.
95 Ibid., p.66
understood as a politics with its own parameters and logics different from that of the elite. He shows how popular politics does not necessarily presume any particular institutional form although it is often conditioned by the functions and activities of modern governmental systems that have now become part of the expected functions of government anywhere. Popular politics can be seen as a politics emerging out of the developmental policies of government aimed at specific population groups that transgresses the strict boundaries of governmental policy. The primacy of governmental politics concerning the politics of the governed becomes even clearer when he defines political society as a site of negotiation and contestation opened up by the activities of governmental agencies aimed at population groups and located in relation to the legal-political forms of the modern state itself. For Chatterjee, popular politics needs to have an engagement with the apparatus of govern mentality. Partha Chatterjee’s (2004) work on “Popular Politics” and study of Koster (2009) on marginalised poor living in fear and abandonment in slums proves very helpful for coming to grip with slum politics.

Notion of politics in slums in this study come closest to what Koster (2009) labels ‘Politics of Marginal’s’ and Partha Chatterjee (2004) mentioned as ‘The Politics of the Governed’. And it is also derived from the preliminary level of field based observation. Concept of politics in this study is more or less similar to Chatterjee’s conceptualisations of popular politics, as it cannot be understood by merely focusing on civil society and politics of the state apparatus and the government. Chatterjee’s attempt to come to an understanding of ‘The Politics of the Governed’ focuses not on the politics of the state apparatus or the government, but on the politics of marginalized people. Koster (2009) adds strongest support to the definition used in this thesis as he distinguishes among slum politics, governmental politics (projects and programs), and electoral politics (voting), which are entwined and interdependent, but different. According to him slum politics is different from a more descriptive notion of politics, which conjures up images of formal policies, policy makers, meetings, desks, budgets, political parties, and a state apparatus, often directly associated with emotive notions like “good governance” or “corruption”.

Slum politics instead includes the ‘manifold forms of organizing’ whether they are individual or more collective, formal or informal. Needs and aspirations are present in the slum, forming the basis for slum politics.\footnote{Martijn Koster, \textit{In Fear of Abandonment: Slum Life, Community Leaders and Politics in Recife, Brazil} (Netherlands: Wageningen University Press, 2009), p. 169}

Therefore this study focuses not only on the electoral politics in the slums but on the internal notions of the politics in slums also. Politics in slums referred in this study talks about the politics within slums. It stands for the particular ways of doing and experiencing politics in the slums. Politics in slums not only includes the politics of the state apparatus and the government but also consist much more than this. Slum politics can be viewed as both distinct from and connecting to the dominant political system. Politics in slums is not only about assuming and maintaining power. Social structure of slums plays important role in shaping politics in slums of city. Slum dwellers are intensely engaged in the struggles for livelihood and that would consider as the part of their participation in politics. Therefore slum reality also depicts an interesting pattern of politics taking shape within it. It has become apparent from literature review that politics in slums along with electoral politics/party politics also includes the aspects of politics like adoption of various approaches of slum dwellers to access resources for living, making demand for community services and participation of slum dwellers in collective community efforts and participation in the protest, demonstrations and various self-help programs. From the definition of politics in slums it becomes clear that it includes politics of grassroots level.

In the above given context present study attempts to understand politics in slums by focusing on politics of basic amenities/services, electoral politics and the involvement of community leaders in politics.

\textbf{1.1 Basic Amenities as Important Aspect of Slum Politics}

Politics in slums is not only about dealing with the governmental institutions but also struggling for the fulfilment of their needs at local level. Politics in slums includes the practices and approaches of slum dwellers to get access of basic social and material needs. Gooptu (2007) in her study has shown that un-availability of various resources to urban poor is not economic concern but for them it is political concern that government is failing to provide public services and economic opportunity to them.
According to her labouring poor interpret their experience of unemployment not primarily as an economic phenomenon, but as a political crisis. This perception has led the poor to abandon political activism, to condemn democratic politics as unrepresentative, and to confine their engagement with institutional politics merely to extracting benefits. Politics among this section of the poor is undergoing intense localization, ignoring the wider arena of democratic politics, thus spelling a crisis of political representation and participation. Chandra (2004) finds that patronage or patron-client relations influence the vote in India. She suggests that citizens exchange their votes for favours, most of which are nothing but everyday services, which any state must provide. Citizens therefore, on Election Day, turn up to vote for the most desirable patrons, if they have a choice, or support the one in front of them, if they do not. Amit Ahuja and Pradeep Chhibber (2014) in their study has find that “in urban areas the residential situation of the marginalized is precarious; more important to it are access to the public distribution system and other livelihood issues. There is a constant threat of their settlement being up-rooted and de-recognised as dwellers of the city. The primary fear in these urban areas is that without political protection (protection from politicians also) from the city administrators could easily dispense with their settlements and their hutments could be destroyed.” This group of citizens is very heavily dependent on state support. Unlike the elite they do not possess the resources to opt out of the system of state supplied goods and services. Therefore, members of this group have a direct relationship with the state. Their current socio-economic status and prospects for mobility are contingent on state support. Access to the police, courts, credit and government jobs are all negotiated through the state functionaries and politicians. Having patron’s matters and politics is to be taken seriously.

Slum dwellers rely very heavily on the state for the provision of goods and services. The criticism of the state was most extensive, and since they are the heaviest users of state services, members belonging to this category made the maximum

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101 Ibid., p.15
number of complain. Briefly put, they would like to see a larger role of the State, and they regard it as a potent force. Harriss (2005) in his study of Delhi slums mentioned that political participation of urban poor in Delhi has exceptionally high amongst the others in Delhi. This would imply that they might have greater access to the state to get basic amenities. As Weibe (1975) in his study of slums in Madras has mentioned that the political horizons of most of the slum people however are very limited most are concerned so persistently with problems of food, shelter and clothing. Lynch’s (1974) remarks on basic needs of slum dwellers in Bombay slums are also relevant in this sense. According to him access to strategic resources, at least for disadvantaged lower class groups, is through political rather than other channels. Group demands, needs and issues are largely diverted into political channels, rather than into religious, social work or private channels. Wit (1996) in his study of slums also accepts that primacy of politics for slum dwellers is partly explained by the fact that political factors may determine whether individuals obtain urgently needed life chances. He has focused on the exchange of votes for material tangible benefits in slum.

According to Chatterjee (2004), popular politics can be seen as ‘a politics emerging out of the developmental policies of government aimed at specific population groups’ that transgresses the strict boundaries of governmental policy. He made governmental politics even clearer when he defines political society as ‘a site of negotiation and contestation opened up by the activities of governmental agencies aimed at population groups.’ As Chatterjee depicts popular politics as a reaction to, or derivative of governmental politics one can find reactions of un-authorised slum in very visible manner. Slum dwellers make reaction against the government for eviction/demolition and public services by protesting and taking demonstration against government in slums. Koster (2009) contributes a lot to

104 According to Joop de wit political factors are much more important to the implementation of policies for the urban poor than generally realised or admitted. Political considerations including perspective elections and the manipulation of groups of votes with similar characteristics (vote bank) may influence policies adversely. It is during the party implementation stage that the private interest of politicians but also of contractors, bureaucrats and slum leaders are especially brought to bear on public policy. For details see J.D Wit. Poverty, Policy, and Politics in Madras Slums: Dynamics of Survival, Gender and Leadership (New Delhi: Thousand Oaks, 1996), pp.18-23.
105 Ibid., p.40
symbolize the ‘basic amenities’ in slums as part of the political life. He has shown that politics in slums does not emerge from governmental politics, but from the local needs and aspirations of the slum population. “Slum politics comprises ways of experiencing and doing politics which are grounded in specific needs and aspirations.”

In contrast to the Chatterjee he argues that slum politics is internally generated, as it is grounded in slum dwellers’ needs and aspirations and expressed in their practices. For him needs for employment, food, goods and other practices of caring, showing loyalty, the production of a shared history, utopian cravings for solidarity, social justice, and environmentalism, and attempts to remain connected and recognised, come together in politics in slum.

He further adds in the concept of the politics in slums and argued that it is an approach to establish connections to the world outside the slum which is considered full of resources and is inhabited by people who have influence and prestige. He further mentioned that slum politics is an attempt by slum dweller to be connected to the political and economic order against the fear of abandonment (being forsaken and excluded by everybody) that they experience on daily basis. Slum politics is about a culture of social connections which emerges from the particular sociability’s of life in the slum.

It can be figured out clearly that not only social life in slums but the political life in slums is also different from the political life of middle class living in mainstream city. As slum dwellers are more dependent on government institutions/policies to get various public services and welfare measures. Therefore, one cannot see politics in slums only by looking at the involvement of slum dwellers in political activities only. Struggle of slum residents for the fulfilment of their basic

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108 As Martijn Koster has shown in his study that slum politics comprises of many practices which take place alongside or in the shadows of the workings of governmental politics. Nonetheless, although slum politics cannot be understood as reactive to or derived from governmental politics, the two are intricately entwined. Slum dwellers’ involvement in governmental politics includes making use of state institutes and agencies and laying claim to social security and pensions. As Koster showed, that aspects of governmental politics have immense effects on the economic situation of slum dwellers and their ways of organizing their lives. Apart from social security provision, governmental politics in Recife is manifested in the slum through many different programmes with objectives that vary from improving infrastructure to enhancing security, and from supporting cultural expressions to building citizenship. ., See Martijn Koster, In Fear of Abandonment: Slum Life, Community Leaders and Politics in Recife, Brazil (Netherlands: Wageningen University Press, 2009), p.179.

109 Ibid., p. 27

110 Ibid., p. 183.
needs is an important part of slum politics. Politics in slums along with electoral politics and governmental politics includes the practices and approaches of slum dwellers to get access of basic services and needs.

Electoral politics is also an important part of politics in slums. Electoral politics in slums includes instrumental practices which are directly or indirectly related to votes or elections in slums. It includes processes like voting, participation in election rallies or campaigns and attending meetings etc. In this study electoral politics focuses more on individual relationship (patron-client) rather than political parties, ideology and agenda.

1.2 Local Leaders as Articulators of Politics in Slums

Individuals engaged in politics in slums are the local leaders, slum dwellers, officials and party workers. The politics in slums involves itself simply in local issues and generated internally. Practices of marginalised to connect with outside world includes the practice of taking help of community leaders to achieve social, political and economic recognition or to get access to basic resources. Social scientist like Weibe (1975), T. K. Majumdar (1983), Edelman and Mitra (2006), Jha Rao and Woolcock (2007), Koster (2009) and Joop De Wit (1996 and 2009) accepts that main articulators of political life in slums are community/local leaders. Community/local leaders are always seen as main protagonist in the studies related to

112 Tapan Kumar Majumdar, *Urbanizing Poor: A Sociological Study of Low Income Migrant Communities in the Metropolitan City of Delhi* (New Delhi: Lancer Publisher, 1983).
the political life of slum dwellers. Therefore, next section of this chapter attempts to define the concept of local leaders in slums.

Previous literature made it very clear that community level leadership is a completely accepted phenomenon that is indispensable to explain the political life in slums. A few revealing studies\textsuperscript{120} introduce the local slum leaders as mediators and agent between local slum residents and the governmental or political institution. Previous studies\textsuperscript{121} commonly witness slum leaders as the main articulator and facilitators of politics in slums. They introduced local slum leaders as mediators and agent or middlemen between local slum residents and the governmental or political institution and a person who connect the slums with the outside world.\textsuperscript{122} Community leaders are viewed as a part and parcel of governmental programmes that connect to the slums and state representatives. Community leaders look for the assistance of resourceful politicians, and politicians seek leaders to aid them in executing certain projects.

Anthropological, Sociological and Political Science literature that deals with the life in Indian slums has focused on the role of the community leaders in slums. Moreover, those works that touch upon local leaders do not explain about community


\textsuperscript{121} Community leaders are the main articulators and facilitators of slum politics. Community leaders know and articulate the needs and aspirations of their fellow slum dwellers, how they make a living while working for the benefit of the community, and how they establish and maintain connections in order to gain prestige and access to resources.

\textsuperscript{122} Paul De Wiebe (1975) in his sociological work has pointed out that most Indian slum leaders play an important role. More often than not they are local and lowest level representatives of the various parties. Hence they are often instrumental in canvassing votes for political parties while linking local areas to the higher political arenas of the state. Slum people always seek patronage whenever they can find it through local leaders and outside contacts. Paul D. Wiebe, \textit{Social Life in An Indian Slum} (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1975). Also see I. Milbert who has mentioned that most slum dwellers are isolated and rely on the political leaders or on the pradhans for establishing contact with different levels of the administration. In some rare cases, they try to act as a group and form delegation to pay a visit, for instance, to the Delhi slum wing usually with little result since their move is not related to a larger and institutionalized action group. For further details See Tapan Kumar Majumdar, \textit{Urbanizing Poor: a Sociological Study of Low Income Migrant Communities in the Metropolitan City of Delhi} (New Delhi: Lancer publisher: 1983) and Joop de Wit, \textit{Poverty, Policy, and Politics in Madras Slums: Dynamics of Survival, Gender and Leadership} (New Delhi: Thousand Oaks, 1996).
leadership in detail (i.e. about the emergence and influence of local leaders) in slums. There is negligible number of studies in India which explains about the community leadership in detail.\textsuperscript{123} As local leaders in slums act as main articulator of politics in slums it becomes important to understand the pattern or nature of local/community leadership to explain the politics in slums. Therefore, this part of chapter attempts to define leaders in slums with the help of secondary literature and on the basis of insights collected during pre-field visit.

From existing literature\textsuperscript{124} it comes into light that leadership in the slums depends upon the social structure existing in the slums. Therefore, it becomes important to know about the existing local/community leadership in slum colonies. It also becomes important to identify the various contexts in which leadership operates. An observation of the pattern of social life among the slum dwellers is important aspect to know the community life in slums. From sociological perspective, the notion of community refers to a group of people united by at least one common characteristic. Such characteristics could include geography or locale, shared interests, values, experience and traditions. Concept of community is frequently based in place and so is local, although it can also represent a community of common interest, purpose or practice. Community can be dropped in favour of social system or social network. Social network stands for a web of interdependent social relations.

Definition of community in this study has been drawn from sociological studies of Majumdar (1977), Weibe (1980), Ratna Rao (1990) and sociological surveys. Community as a group of people living in a neighbouring geographical area, who have some shared interests and concerns. Community is a social structure made up of heterogeneous group of people living together on a given land area. Initially small groups put their dwellings on un-used lands (illegally occupied); gradually these dwelling clusters develop into settlements with ‘identifiable geographical boundaries’ and the settlements turn into communities. As community also represent social network, therefore individuals in a community are tied by one or more specific types

\textsuperscript{123} Only few Authors Paul de Wiebe, Arup Mitra and Sumitra Jha, Tapan Kumar Majumdar, Joop De Wit in their study have been attempted to study local aspect of leadership in slums of India.

of interdependency such as friendship, kinship, common interest, financial exchange and beliefs.

Community Organization is formal and informal association\(^{125}\) of persons whose membership depends on residence requirement in a geographically well defined community or a locale; here membership in the association is by choice. These associations contain explicitly informal or formal leadership structure. In cases where geographical locale coincides or coterminous with ethnic or caste identities membership is limited to a caste or a community residency within a locale. Social networks operates on many levels from family up to the level of nations and play a critical role in determining the ways problems are solved. Community network is seen as an organization of urban migrants based on their shared collective identities like language, region, religion, caste and other ethnic ties which binds them together. It is a cluster of people with the same background, culture they operate in the same kind of environment in the most community. In this context migrants colonies, Sabhas, Samities and associations are viewed as an example of community networks. Different types of associations are found in the slums, ranging from informal and traditional associations such as Panchayats and festival committees to formal political associations. Majumdar (1977) distinguishes between associations based on traditional ascriptive identities (i.e. kinship, communal and regional ties) and those which cut across such affiliations particularly in economic and occupational activities, education and other social services. He finds that later type of associations is more transitory which involves the participation of fewer ones.\(^{126}\) It has also been found that demographic factors such as the size of slum and degree of heterogeneity, affect the kind of local associations which can be expected to emerge.\(^{127}\) Perlman has been studied social, political and religious associations within the Favelas (Slums in Brazil). By making direct observation of the activities of these organisations and

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125 Singh and D'Souza (1980) in their work put forward that there are many different types of associations in the slums, ranging from informal and traditional associations such as Panchayats and festival committees to formal political associations which are linked up to to the regional or national level parties. However, most people who have studied this problem agree that caste, region and religion provide the most common bases for organization and participation in local association. See Andrea Manefee Singh, and Alfred D’ Souza, *The Urban Poor: Slum and Pavement Dwellers in the Major Cities of India* (New Delhi: Manohar Publication, 1980), p.57.


statistical analysis of the type of membership he has come to the conclusion that the
social and political organizations serve very similar functions and draw upon a similar
constituency.128

The community networks and associations do not merely have the capacity to
mobilise migrants around issues they also provide a fertile ground and a platform for
community leaders to emerge. Community social network is a social structure made
up of individuals or organizations which are tied or connected by one or more specific
types of interdependency such as friendship, kinship, common interest financial
exchange, dislike relationship of beliefs and knowledge.129 Community organization
is referred to formal or informal associations of persons whose membership in the
association is by choice. Associations contain formal or informal leadership structure.
Community organization also stands for community association or panchayat or caste
panchayat. Most of the community based organizations are leaders centred. Local
slum community leader is referred as socially and politically active, well-known
person from one of the many poor neighbourhoods.130 The term is not applied to
individuals appointed to particular functions, but to persons with particular life
histories and characteristics. The leadership is a severely fought for position, one for
which a reputation has to be cultivated over the time.131

Present study refers to local leadership as a specific form of the general
concept of leadership. Local leadership in slum is about community and grassroots

128 According to Perlman the critical dimension which determines the political nature of associations
is that participation in either type confesses broad experience in bargaining for benefits from the
outside world. These associations maintain a wide variety of contacts with public and private
institutions –as well as individual patrons– to secure individual financial support, permits,
authorizations, and documents. The local leaders who serve the brokerage function between their
members and outside contacts are continual source of information on the aspects of city
bureaucracy most relevant to the daily lives of favelados. Perlman The organisation or association
purely political in nature typically serve as the official spokesman for the community in dealings
with outsiders and has the important job within the favela of handling the extension of urban
services to the area Perlman. See Jenice.E. Perlman, The Myth of Marginality: Urban Poverty and

129 According to social network analyst social relationship in terms of network analyst social
relationship called “nodes” which are tied by one or more specific types of interdependency such
as friendship, kinship, common interest, financial exchange, dislike or relationship of beliefs.

130 See Martijn Koster, In Fear of Abandonment: Slum Life, Community Leaders and Politics in

131 Martijn Koster and Pieter A. de Vries, “Slum Politics: Community leaders, Everyday Needs and
Utopian Aspirations in Recife, Brazil,” Focaal—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology,
62 (2012), p.6
leadership in slums. According to T. K. Majumdar (1978) grassroots leaders are drawn from the different kin-cum-caste or village based social groups whose members reside together in compact areas in the various bastis. Such leaders draw their strength from traditional mutual bonds that exist between them and other members of the groups. Recruitment to this type of leadership role, though based on traditional principal is not strictly ascribed, and is achieved by consensus and acceptance by the members of the group.\footnote{Tapan Kumar Majumdar, The Urban Poor and Social Change : A Study of Squatter Settlements in Delhi , in Alfred D’ Souza (eds.), The Indian City : Poverty ,Ecology and Urban Development (New Delhi :Manohar Publications, 1978) and also see Tapan Kumar Majumdar, Urbanizing Poor: a Sociological Study of Low Income Migrant Communities in the Metropolitan City of Delhi (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers:1983).}

There can be found one more stratum of leadership at the level of larger groupings of a single caste, religion or region whose members may or may not form a compact spatial unit in the bastis. These leaders may be drawn from the leaders of the small groups at the dwelling cluster level or may be in close touch with them. Leadership at this level is not confined to a single individual but consists of a few individuals. If there exists formalised caste Panchayats in the bastis, their members are regarded as leaders of the caste or community groups. They generally consist of a council of six to eight members and are elected democratically or through implicit acceptance on basis of consensus by members of the concerned caste community.

The local/community leaders are spokespersons of the poor and president of a grassroots organisation. Local/community leader refers to a person who has had a reputation in the community or a person who has a position in any of the community organizations such as residents association, formal panchayat, caste panchayats, local cell of a political party, or a person who has had influence over community affairs and is capable of preventing or amending a decision taken by official agencies. Field visits in slums of Chandigarh City has shown that all the community leaders are not political leaders in formal sense of term but most of them are indeed connected to one or other relevant political party in the political landscape. There are factors like education, network entrepreneurship and working efficiency which help them to become a community leader. Community leadership could be formal as well as informal. Existing literature represents that local leaders are considered as the mediators or agents in India, rapid urbanisation and increasing urban poverty have
also led to an enhanced role of the state and a peculiar dependence of the urban population on the state. The urban poor themselves are generally unable to approach or to deal with state agencies, so they face access problems. The problem of access includes the difficulties in making organisational connections, the way in which resources are distributed and the kind of links between institutions and client (Schaffer, Bernard and Huang, 1975: 14). 133

Above given definition of community leadership and politics in slum provides with the insight that the meaning of politics differs from the middle and upper class due to the marginalisation of political and economic order. Slum politics differs from assumptions and theories reproduced among those concerned with formal politics (notions like political parties, political alliances, citizenship and democracy). While external notions like governmental politics and clientelism are not enough to understand slum politics, it becomes important to view slum politics with the notions which provide an approach to look slum politics with its own dynamics. Many existing theories attempted to understand political and social life in slum with various perspectives. Before moving to the next step to understand politics in slums of Chandigarh City it becomes important to throw some light on existing theories.

1.3 Politics in Slums as Reflection from the Below

Existing studies of political and social life in slums or urban poor evidently proves that slums are not similar to localities where the upper and middle classes live. The slum people have their own way of life and social and political culture. 134 Authors like Desai and Pillai (1972), Madan (1969), Nayak (1968) have made contribution to the literature that Indian urban poor are disjointed from the rest of the society, with identifiable characteristics of their own. These works are positive about the internal dynamics of slum life. Further addressing the distinction of slum dwellers from middle class Dhadave (1989), Chatterjee (2004) and Koster (2009) provide with the insight that life in the slum has its own logics and dynamics and it can only be

134 Oscar Lewis in “Culture of Poverty” shows that Poverty is a way of life; poor are a different kind of people they think and feel differently. Poverty has its own modalities and distinctive social and psychological consequences for its member's affects participation in the larger national culture, and becomes a subculture of its own. Oskar Lewis, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty - San Juan & New York* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Limited,1965).
understood from its own parameters. Therefore, it becomes important to study nature of politics within slum from its own logics and parameters. The political and economic practices of slum dwellers are constantly being neglected and marginalised in the dominant views on politics, society and the economy. External notions like governmental politics and electoral politics are not enough to understand politics in slums. It has becomes important to view politics in slums with the notions which provide an approach to look slums politics with its own specific parameters. Politics of slums should be understood as a politics with its own parameters and logics, ‘different from that of the elite’ popular politics. As life in slum is fundamentally different from middle or upper class life, therefore, it is necessary to see meaning of life and politics in slums from a different spectrum or vision.

The present study attempts to view and understand the politics as it un-folds in the slums differently from the politics as understood and theorise outside slums or mainstream politics of middle class and upper class. This study views the politics from the below by focusing on the politics of marginalized people in slums of Chandigarh city. Study mainly concerned with the internal notions which are grounded in slum dwellers basic needs and aspirations.

By understanding this kind of study the researcher hopes to provide a support to the existing studies which emphasised on internal dynamics of slums to understand political life in slums rather than by banking on external conceptualizations that emanates from the experiences of the intended/planned/mainstream urban space. This study will add support to the sociological, anthropological and political study which urges to see life in slums with internal notions or its own logics and dynamics.

2. **Theoretical Consideration of the Study**

This section deals with the broader theoretical explanation used to explain the concept of politics in slums. The study on politics of slums mentioned here is informed by some larger theoretical concerns that we shared as students of social sciences. Existing theories from sociological, anthropological and political perspective provides an important insight to frame theoretical framework for the present study. Politics in slums in this study is being located in to the larger context of ‘Culture of Poverty’.

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135 Governmental politics deals with the public policies, good governance, budgets, issues of citizenship, political parties and governmental institution
‘Theory of Marginality’ and predominantly located to the ‘Theory of Patronage Politics’. All the three theories and literature available on this context provide with the great insights on the life of slum dwellers. Theory of Marginality and Culture of Poverty established that slums and squatter settlements are not integrated into city and national political life. The squatters supposedly lacks internal political organisation resulting in the effective importance of slums in relation to external government agencies. Those who are residing in squatters are thought to have little interest in politics, and little awareness of political events. The peripheral slum population in most of the countries is still characterized, as a focus of discontent and political disruptiveness.

Oscar Lewis in his thesis of ‘Culture of Poverty’ reflects constructively on the behaviour of those who live at margins with the culture of poverty. According to him “these people are characterized by low aspirations, political apathy, helplessness and disorganization. There is a lack of participation and integration of the poor in the major institution of the larger society. This concept also implies that poverty in itself forces individual to reproduce patterns of action, which do not allow them to improve their living conditions. They think and feel differently from other people. He has declared that poverty is a way of life, which is remarkably stable and persistent, passed down from generation to generation along family lines. The culture of poverty has its own modalities and distinctive social and psychological consequences for its members.” Lewis (1966) notion of the 'Sub-culture of Poverty' has come to denote a situation in which people are trapped in a social environment characterized by apathy, fatalism, lack of aspirations, exclusive concern with immediate gratifications, and frequent endorsement of delinquent behaviour. Not only material, but moral destitution as well, is an essential part of slum life. Therefore, according to thesis of ‘Culture of Poverty’ there is a lack of participation and integration of the poor in the major institutions of the larger society. He further points out that slum dwellers are not members of trade unions and political parties and have a mistrust of existing government. Similar views have been expressed by certain sociologist of Latin American countries while dealing with the political opinions of the under-privileged and the poor.

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The concept of ‘Marginality’ is mainly a European and Latin American construct. “Unlike the ‘Sub-culture-of-Poverty’ view, this theory recognizes the existence of aspirations among slum dwellers. Non-attainment of these aspirations is not due to the fact that people are trapped by a culture of apathy but due to their carrying with them from rural areas a baggage of traditional norms and values which prevents their successful adaptation to the urban style of life. The problems which confront slum dwellers are, thus not so much the consequence of structural arrangements limiting the availability of occupational and housing opportunities as they are the outcome of the shortcomings of individual migrants. They lack the occupational skills and modern values necessary to succeed and, thus they are pushed out to the social and geographical margins of urban society.”

The theory of marginality predicts that slum dwellers rarely participate in electoral politics, avoid direct action politics, and frequently attempt to pursue individual goals through administrative channels. Slums have no internal political organisation. The theory of marginality is defined by the concept of disintegration. That is, as a lack of internal cohesiveness that makes them appear atomized and dispersed. Dominant in these areas are isolationism and dispersion; these make them appear as disorganized groups, without internal links or coherent social expression to define them positively in front of the society as a whole. The participant is modern and integrated; the non-participant is traditional and marginal. And the obvious practical lesson is the need to increase participation.

After going through the theories of marginalisation, it has become clear that slums are seen as places which are socially and politically disintegrated and unorganised. These theories propose that poor people residing in squatters’ lack internal political organisation they have little interest in politics, have little awareness of political events and rarely participate in electoral politics, they avoid direct action politics and frequently attempt to pursue individual goals through administrative channels. In order to explain the politics in slums of any society it becomes important to see the political structure of slum dwellers through the prism of marginality. One has to see whether the claims of these theories can be substantiated completely or

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partially in slums or the political life in slums contradicts not the existing theories by showing opposite character of political and social life in slums.

This study also locates the problem within the framework of few other larger works which understand politics in slums with the help of governmental politics and political patronage or clientelism perspective. Popular media and academic literature see slum dwellers as victims of a clientelist political system, impelled to sell their votes to manipulative politicians in return for favours. Governmental notions of politics in slums deal with the issues like public policies, political parties, notion of good governance, state institutions and governmental agencies. In governmental politics state and formal public policies get much importance. Notions of political parties and alliances, elections, and civil society organizations have been used to explain political clientelism. In this view politics in the slum is narrowed down to participation of slum dwellers in governmental programmes. Patron-client kind of politics relies heavily on material inducements and rewards to win and hold the loyalty of the slum dwellers. According to Kitschiest and Wilkinson’s (2007) these material incentives can be channelled to individuals and their families, or to clearly design communal or neighbourhood groups. Patron-clientelism syndrome represents the direct distribution of public resources by political office holders or candidates in exchange for political support (in the form of vote). Poor are integrated as one category in terms of framing patronage policies. Political clientelism represents the distribution of resources by political office holders or political candidates in exchange for political support in the form of vote. Chandra (2007) also seen the notion of

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138 Clientelism refers to lack of impersonal rules for the allocation of resources. It shows that the linkage between citizen and politicians is often based on direct material inducement targeted to individuals and small groups of citizens. Party leaders in slums twist the available institutional mechanisms to create their own personal patronage and get benefits in electoral terms. Patrons distribute public resources in such manner that they get maximum benefits in terms of votes.

139 According to Kitschiest and Wilkinson’s linkage between citizen-politicians are often based on direct material inducement targeted to individuals and small groups of citizens whom politicians know to be highly responsive to such side payment and willing to surrender their votes for the right price “voter-party” linkages. Patronage is subclass of clientelism. Patronage is the offering of public resources (most typically public employment) by office holder in return for electoral support, where the criteria of distribution are clientelist. Did you, will you, vote for me. See Politics, informality and clientelism – exploring a pro-poor urban politics. For details see Herbert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson, “Citizen-Politician Linkages: An Introduction,” in Herbert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson (eds.), Patrons, Clients and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.649.
political clientelism as one of the central element of the populist appeal but also has been defined as mode of vertical inclusion distinct from populism. Clientelist relationship between politicians and poor voters demonstrate that politicians, often acting through their agents (slumlords, fixers and local leaders) provide voters with goods and services that they cannot access through the normal bureaucratic system, in return for political support. Chatterjee (2004, 2008) and Harriss (2005) expresses one specific version of this view when they argue that the poor work through political channels whereas more affluent citizens stake their claims through directly engaging with the bureaucracy and government agencies. Of course, this does not mean that every slum-dweller will have access to every service he/she wants. Clearly, the city has a limited budget and it may be unable to supply all the services at the desired level.

Diana Mitlin (2006) in her paper while exploring about how to instigate, negotiate or otherwise secure pro-poor government in towns and cities of the global South found that clientelist bargaining prevails. According to her there is a consistent set of needs related to residency in informal settlements; tenure is insecure and there is a lack of access to basic services, infrastructure, and sometimes other entitlements. Households and communities have to negotiate these collective consumption goods in a context in which political relations are primarily informal, with negotiations that take place away from the transparent and accountable systems of ‘modern’ government. “Clientelism, or the use of the patron-client networks that link powerful social groups to the urban poor to secure political advantage for the former and limited resources for the latter, emerges from many studies of informal settlements in the global South. While this literature acknowledges that there are different kinds of clientelism, it has a particular focus on the exchange of partially provided public services (such as water, drainage or sanitation) and sometimes individual jobs or wages secured by community leaders for votes and other forms of political support. Clientelist relations have been described and widely critiqued in


respect of their ability to undermine efforts to support inclusive and pro-poor urban
neighbourhoods, and towns and cities.”

As Harriss (2010) has shown that towns and cities in the India include formal
neighbourhoods with better access to public goods and, in some cases, a reliable
supply. Citizens living in mainstream city are less motivated to negotiate with local
politicians and, having higher incomes, are likely to be able to assert their influence in
other ways. In informal settlements, the lack of access to basic services in a context of
scarce municipal and/or utility resources encourages the prevalence of clientelist
bargaining. As Chatterjee (2004) elaborates in the context of India, many of the
urban poor are only tenuously, ambiguously and contextually rights-bearing citizens.
This is a context in which clientelism flourishes. De Wit and Berner (2009) also
accept that clientelist relations are particularly prevalent in informal settlements, due
to the lack of services and the need to negotiate with politicians and sometimes
officials to secure such investments. The state does not have sufficient resources to
provide essential infrastructure and services. They further indicate that the urban
poor are not ‘naturally’ inclined to engage in horizontal organizations or get involved
in collective actions. Often they prefer to rely on patronage, such as relatives or
intermediaries, to safeguard livelihoods and obtain (individual) access to persons and
institutions of value to them. Patronage becomes politicized especially for the
working classes and the urban poor who are seen as vote banks by the political
parties.

Both Wit (1996) and Breman (2003) discuss the relationship between slums
and the agencies of mainstream politics as an expression of machine politics. In this
context of slums the relationship emerges as a mix of machine politics and populism.
They look upon slums as recipient populations of state welfare. Such populist
measures reinforce the systems of political patronages operating within slums.

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142 Diana Mitlin, “Politics, Informality and Clientelism – Exploring a Pro-Poor Urban Politics,”
143 John Harriss, Participation and Contestation in the Governance of Indian cities (Vancouver:
   School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University, 2010).
144 Partha Chatterjee, The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the
145 Joop De Wit and Erhard Berner, “Progressive Patronage? Municipalities, NGOs, CBOs and the
146 Joop De Wit and Erhard Berner, “Progressive Patronage? Municipalities, NGOs, CBOs and the
Problems of slum populations are seen as administrative problems and not as problems of citizens. Within this view the slum is a domain of a populist politics with no space for reflection about the kinds of communities that slum dwellers would like to construct. Auyero (2001) in his study “Poor People’s Politics: Peronist Survival Networks and the Legacy of Evita” shows that political activities of slums are based on externalist, middle and upper-class, conceptualizations of politics. He equates slum politics with governmental and electoral politics and notions of clientelism. In the above given views politics in the slum is narrowed down to participation of slum dwellers in governmental programmes. There is voluminous literature which largely sees political life in slums from the perspective of political patronage theory and governmental politics in slums of India. These studies have narrowed down the concept of politics in the slums to participation of slum dwellers in elections, state welfare policies, involvement in electoral campaigns, role of political parties and clientelist relations only (Desai and Pilli, 1972; Weibe, 1980; Gay 1994; Wit, 1996; Auyero, 2001 and Chaudhri, 2005). Political patronage perspective provided with an insight that politics in slums is primarily based on prevalence of political patronage perspective and they emphasis principally on governmental politics to understand the pattern of politics in slums.

Patronage politics occupies a major place in existing literature of slum politics. Political patronage theory in slum focused primarily on a patron-client perspective of local politics. Nelson (1979) argues that urban poor take part in political actions; primarily to placate, or win benefits from patron or an urban political machine. Patron-client kind of politics relies heavily on material inducements and rewards to win and hold the loyalty of the slum dwellers. Patronage theory also depicts that leaders in slums, are heavily entangled in clientelist practices. Patrons or local leaders

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148 Though the major aims of these (sociological, political and anthropological) studies are not to understand the political aspects of slums but they would be considered as an important contribution to the political perspective in slums.

149 Desai and Pillai (1972) have studied political consciousness of slum dwellers and political parties in slums of Bombay (Mumbai) city. Wiebe (1980) studied political parties, communities and political leaders and elections, Chaudhri (2005) has focused on the political system, political parties, legislative institutions and governmental decisions to find out political culture of the migrant slum dwellers in Calcutta. Wit (1996) explained about the politics in slums with the help of policy conception and its implementation in slum. Interdependence between policy and politics is exposed through an analysis of machine politics of Tamil Nadu.

in slum are easily accessible to slum dwellers rather than other political officials. Slum dwellers are more dependent on welfare policies of government or state. They are facing conditions of scarcity and competition in the rapid growing urban population era. According to Chandra (2004) “Clientelism or ‘vote-buying’ pervades among all socio-economic strata of urban society, but is particularly prevalent among the poor. In the classic patron-client exchange, elected officials enjoy discretion in the implementation of laws and allocating jobs. These goods are distributed to voters on an individualized basis, in return for their political support in elections.”

Present study which simply needs to know about the nature of politics in slums of Chandigarh City has been located in to the larger theories like “Theory of Marginality”, “Culture of Poverty” and “Patronage Politics or Theory” to know about the nature of politics in slums. This study perceives that politics in slums as practices and experiences of slum dwellers is more than the mere governmental policies and clientelist approaches in slums. Politics in slums does fit absolutely in to the theories of marginalisation as political awareness, political organisation and ability of slum dwellers to influence electoral politics shows the contradicting characteristics of slum dwellers given in the theories. The theoretical question whether politics in slums is only about patronage politics and governmental policies in slums or whether politics in slums consist much more than this in the slums remains open for the further study. As far as the present study is concerned the politics in slums depends on the patron-client theory up to some extent but explaining it only on the basis of patronage concept is not fair.