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GENDER VARIANT AND ELECTORAL POLITICS OF PUNJAB: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE VOTERS OF DOABA REGION

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Abstract:

All the developed countries of the world agree that sustainable development of society is the need of this hour. This need has put forth the importance of equality and unity among the citizens of the respective country. One portion of society cannot be ignored for the sake of others, and the overall development, irrespective of caste, religion, region, class, and gender, is a must. In the context of the electoral politics of Punjab, gender is a crucial variant that influences what we see as the electoral outcome of elections at the state level. The low percentage of women candidates contesting elections, in turn, affect the voter turnout of the same gender, and if they do come out to vote, it is only their hands exercising the right. In reality, they are working for the empowerment of patriarchal sovereignty. Though women have recently been winning the game of numbers as far as their voter turnout and political awareness in elections is concerned, but is it enough to conclude that they are on the path towards political empowerment; where they contest elections in the same numbers as the males do and decide whom to vote without any burden?

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1.0 Introduction:

Religion, Caste, Socioeconomic background, age, regional specifications are determinant factors in the electoral politics of Punjab. All of these variants affect the electoral performance of political parties in assembly elections. Like the factors mentioned above, gender is also a dominant element in analyzing the electoral politics of Punjab. It shapes and defines the electoral results of any election. Many research projects have pointed out that the condition of women is not so good given the fact that India has entered the twenty-first century. Women empowerment is still a dominant issue to be addressed on a priority basis. "Even though Punjab is a highly developed state in economic terms yet the condition of women here is not different from their counterparts in the world due to its strong patriarchal values" (Kaur, 2010). The gender gap has affected women in all spheres of life - social, political, and economical. As far as the electoral politics of Punjab is

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concerned, the role played by women is not up to the mark. It is the male who takes the electoral decisions.

A long history in including women candidates in electoral politics of Punjab reveals that not more than 10 percent of women candidates contest in Punjab assembly elections, and the winning percentage is even lower. Taking the instance of assembly elections in 2012, 14 women candidates were elected compared to their total population of 48 percent. Compared to their counterparts, they are still far behind as far as their political participation is concerned. In the 2017 assembly elections, only 7 percent of the 1145 candidates were women. 'Varinder Kaur Loomba, a sitting legislator from Shutrana, said, "Patriarchy and male dominance still exist in our state. Despite that, many women are coming forward, but there is very little appreciation" (Shah, 2017).

In sharp contrast to their percentage in contesting elections is the surprising data in their enthusiasm in exercising their right to vote. The 2017 assembly elections shows, "of the 1,145 candidates, only 81 women were in the fray in Punjab. A total of 78.14% (93.75 lakh) women exercised their franchise, while 76.69% (80.54 lakh) men came forward to cast their vote" (Nibber, 2017).

2.0 Objectives of the study:

The study is designed to probe into the electoral politics of Punjab concentrating on Doaba region in the context of the variable of gender. To fulfil this objective, the research paper aims to find any significant difference among the male and female voters of the Doaba region as far as their awareness of electoral issues and voting behavior is concerned.

3.0 Methodology:

In order to analyze the political awareness and voting behavior of the voters of the Doaba region, the primary data has been collected from two districts of the Doaba region with the help of a stratified random sampling method. A sample of 60 respondents was taken, keeping in mind the variant of gender. The responses from these participants have been recorded with the help of a questionnaire. The questionnaire is structured, choosing one option that enquires about political participation, awareness of electoral issues, and voters' preferences while voting.

4.0 Profile of the respondents of Doaba region:

Doaba region is named so because it is situated between the two rivers Sutlej and Beas. The region is well known for the largest share of NRIs in Punjab, and SCs also have the maximum population in this region compared to other regions- Malwa and Majha.

The total population of SCs is 31 percent in entire Punjab, but in Doaba, they comprise 37 percent, which is higher than that of the whole state. For the present study, the respondents are taken from the Jalandhar and Shahid Bhagat Singh Nagar districts of Doaba. The 2011 census reports that out of the entire population of 2,193,590 of Jalandhar, 1,145,211 are male, and 1,048,379 are female. In Shahid Bhagat Singh Nagar, the total population is 612,310, accounting for 299,019 females and 313,291 males.

Table 1: Connection between Religion and Politics

Responses	Male	Female	Total
Agree	7	14	21
Disagree	14	19	33
Neutral	2	4	6
Total	23	37	60

Source: Primary data generated by author



The above table shows that while probing the connection between religion and politics in the Doaba region of Punjab, out of the total 60 (23 male and 37 female) participants, 21 (7 male and 14 female) respondents believe that there is a connection between religion and politics in Punjab and 33 (14 male and 19 female) disagree with the same opinion. In comparison, six respondents have remained neutral (two male and four female).

Table 2: Influence of Religious Belief of a Political Party or Candidate while Voting

Responses	Male	Female	Total
Agree	3	10	13
Disagree	18	23	41
Neutral	2	4	6
Total	23	37	60

Source: Primary data generated by author

The data collected in the field research shows that out of the 23 male surveyors, three agree, eighteen disagree, and two have remained neutral to the statement when they have been enquired whether they are affected by the religious belief of political party or candidate while voting. Out of the 37 participants, ten agree, 23 disagree, and four have remained neutral about the same opinion. The table also shows that the total number of respondents is 60, out of which 13 agree, 41 disagree, and six have remained neutral when we look at the data irrespective of the gender of the participants.

Table 3: whether Punjab is a Sikh Dominated state

Responses	Male	Female	Total
Agree	11	13	24
Disagree	11	20	31
Neutral	1	4	5
Total	23	37	60

Source: Primary data generated by author

The above table suggests that out of the 60 participants, 24 (11 male and 13 female) respondents agree to the opinion that Punjab is a Sikh dominated state, and 31 (11 male and 20 female) disagree with the same statement, while 5 (1 male and four female) respondents have remained to choose neither of the options.

Table 4: Intermingling of Religious Issues and Electoral Politics

Responses	Male	Female	Total
Yes	13	12	25
No	10	25	35
Total	23	37	60

Source: Primary data generated by author

The table represents that 25 (13 male and 12 female) participants agree that there is an intermingling of religious issues and electoral politics in Punjab, and 35 (10 male and 25 female) surveyors do not approve of the same opinion. The total number of male and female respondents accounts for 23 and 37, respectively.

Table No. 5 Significance of Caste Of The Candidate While Voting

Responses	Male	Female	Total
Yes	6	13	19
No	17	24	41
Total	23	37	60

Source: Primary data generated by author

In the above table, 19 (6 male and 13 female) respondents agree that they are affected by the candidate's caste while voting. 41 (17 male and 24 female) participants have negated the same opinion. The total number of male respondents is 23, and that of the female is 37.

Table 6: Nature of the Electoral Politics of Punjab

Nature of the Electoral Politics	Male	Female	Total
Based on religion and caste	4	12	16
Based on public welfare	4	12	16
Any other	2	2	4
Based on securing political power	13	11	24
Total	23	37	60

Source: Primary data generated by author

While probing the nature of electoral politics of Punjab, it has been found that 16 (4 male and 12 female) respondents claim that the electoral politics of Punjab is based on religion and caste, the same number of participants believe that it is based on public welfare, 4 (2 male and 2 female) have picked the option of 'any other.' In comparison, 24 (13 male and 11 female) think it is based on securing political power.

Table 7: Centre-State Relations in the State Politics of Punjab

Responses	Male	Female	Total
Yes	12	25	37
No	11	12	23
Total	23	37	60

Source: Primary data generated by author

The table suggests that 37 (12 male and 25 female) respondents agree that center-state relations have continuously affected the state politics of Punjab. 23 (11 male and 12 female) think otherwise.

Table 8: Interference of Political Parties in the Religious Institutions

Responses	Male	Female	Total
Yes	13	28	41
No	10	9	19
Total	23	37	60

Source: Primary data generated by author

The table represents that 41 (13 male and 28 female) respondents believe that political parties interfere in the working of religious institutions. 19 (10 male and 9 female) participants do not agree with the same opinion.

Table 9: Role of Centre Government in Influencing the Assembly Elections of Punjab

Responses	Male	Female	Total
Yes	12	21	33
No	11	16	27
Total	23	37	60

Source: Primary data generated by author

According to the data, 33 (12 male and 21 female) respondents have voted in favor of the statement that the central government plays a vital role in influencing the assembly elections of Punjab, while 27 participants (11 male and 16 female) disagree with the same opinion. The table also shows that out of 60 respondents, 23 are male, and 37 are female.

Table 10: Important Aspects While Voting

Aspects	Male	Female	Total
Candidate	7	14	21
Caste	2	4	6
Party	4	5	9
Any other	10	14	24
Total	23	37	60

Source: Primary data generated by author

In order to probe into the voting behavior of the respondents, they were provided with four options, 21 (7 male and 14 female) repliers prefer the profile of the candidate while voting, 6 (2 male and 4 female) prefer the caste of the candidate, 9 (4 male and 5 female) prefer the party over other options and 24 (10 male and 14 female) have not picked any of the options among the available ones.

Table 11: Electoral Issue to be Resolved on Priority Basis

Electoral Issues	Male	Female	Total
Issue of desecration of Guru Granth Sahib	6	4	10
Drugs Issue	2	9	11
Water Issue	8	12	20
Lack of Democratic Structure in parties	2	1	3
Issue of Unemployment	5	11	16
Total	23	37	60

Source: Primary data generated by author

According to the data collected in the field research, 10 (6 male and 4 female) respondents think that the issue of desecration of Guru Granth Sahib should be resolved on a priority basis, 11 (2 male and 9 female) participants believe that drugs issue should be tackled on priority basis, 20 (8 male and 12 female) surveyors feel that issue of waters of Punjab is worthy of being stand-alone among other issues, 3 (2 male and 1 female) participants think that issue of lack of democratic structure in parties should be addressed on priority basis, and 16 (5 male and 11 female) think that the issue of unemployment is more significant among other issues which should be tackled in quick succession.

5.0 Result and Conclusion:

After the data analysis, it has been found that there was no significant difference between the attitude of male and female respondents when they were tested based on their political awareness and voting behavior and the overall knowledge of the electoral politics of Punjab. The particular questions in the questionnaire were designed to probe into the nature of the electoral politics of



Punjab so that the researcher can find the gap between the voters of two different genders. However, all the voters/respondents, irrespective of their gender, show equal interest and political awareness. The responses show that both male and female participants are at par as far as their voting behavior is concerned, and there is no significant gap that the researcher can highlight.

6.0 Recommendations:

Though the male and female respondents of the Doaba region seem to be on equal footing as far as their awareness of electoral issues and the voting behavior is concerned, but the actual voting process is a complex one, and there are high chances that the female voters feel the pressure of their families while making the actual decisions during voting. Also, the fact that their political representation and active participation in politics is significantly low compared to their counterparts is another factor that should correlate with the study's findings.

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