



Political Awareness and Involvement of Dalit Woman Labourers in Rural Punjab: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

Based on primary data collected from 927 Dalit woman labour households spread over geographical three regions of Punjab, the present study has brought out that a large majority of Dalit woman labourers have no interest in politics and have never participated in any political campaign/public assembly in all the regions. The field survey reveals that they have no time to watch or listen to news because they remain pre-occupied with domestic chores. In almost all the cases, their husbands don't share the domestic responsibilities. Being illiterate, majority of them are not able to read newspapers. Generally, they cast their vote in elections by the choice of their senior male family members. Some of the respondents have casted their vote under the pressure of shopkeepers/traders/money-lenders, religious leaders; and employers/landlords. Surprisingly, a very large majority of the respondents are not willing to elect as representatives in elections, if they get any opportunity in all the regions. This brings out the extent of exclusion of woman labourers in Indian democracy.

Keywords: Dalit; Woman labourers; Political awareness; Elections; Rural punjab

Introduction

Abraham Lincoln, 16th president of the United States, defined democracy as a government of the people, by the people, and for the people [1]. Although the Constitution of India provides equal political rights to all the individuals, but half of the Indian population is not justifiably represented in the political arena. The benefits of development have not yet fully reached all sections of the society. The preamble of Indian Constitution promises to provide justice, liberty, and equality to all its citizens. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the ground of gender, and Article 16 (1) and (2) provides for equality to hold any public office. Further, the 73rd amendment has made statutory provision with regard to the reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The reservation system at the grassroots level has

provided new horizons for women participation in political activities. It has boosted the representation of women in rural local bodies of the country. It is a great step towards the empowerment of women in the Indian society. Despite the outcry over the ineffective reservation policies of the government, women's representation at both the state and centre levels politics remains low. Their representation in the decision-making bodies is inadequate [2]. In India, females constitute almost half of the total population. The success of Indian democracy depends on the equal participation of both men and women in the democratic institutions of the country. But in the male-dominated Indian society, the participation of women in democratic institutions is not up to the expected level. The importance of women's political participation for a viable democratic polity is being increasingly realized in all corners of the world [3]. Women in general and the

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Dalit women in particular face many problems and find it difficult to participate in the political process that has hitherto been in a male bastion. They are not adequately represented in our legislative bodies. This is a serious challenge in initiating good governance [4]. Political voice and decision-making power concerning basic services, economic development, and social justice are critical factors in challenging and transforming structural caste-class-gender discrimination, and in enabling the Dalit women to realize their fundamental rights [5]. The level of political participation is not uniformly distributed throughout the population. It is directly related to their income, educational qualification, occupational status, caste, and religion [6]. The Dalit women are placed at the bottom of caste, class, and gender hierarchies. They suffer discrimination of many sorts - as Dalit's, as poor, and as women. They are landless wage labourers and have limited access to basic resources [7]. Because of these facts, they hardly participate in politics. The Dalit's are subjected to the worst forms of exclusion, stigma, and violence based on their caste, work, descent, and identity. They are considered as 'lower' in status, ritually 'impure' and 'polluting'; and thus, isolated physically, socially, and politically from other castes and communities of the society. They are subjected to violence and atrocities, perpetuated by 'higher' status communities. Apart from it, they are excluded from various public and private resources, and services for development and welfare [8]. The present paper examines the participation of Dalit woman labourers in politics both at the state as well as central levels.

Data and Methodology

The present study based on multi-stage systematic random sampling technique is related to the year 2016-17. For the purpose of present study, four districts were selected from the three geographical regions of Punjab, viz. Majha, Doaba, and Malwa. Amritsar district was selected from the Majha region; Jalandhar district from the Doaba region; whereas two districts, viz. Mansa and Fatehgarh Sahib, were selected from the Malwa region. At the next stage, one village from each development block of the

selected districts was chosen on the basis of random sampling technique. From these villages, 927 Dalit woman labour households were randomly selected and investigated by taking 20 per cent households from the total number of Dalit woman labour households. Out of these 927 respondent households, 340 households belonged to Malwa, 243 to Doaba and 314 to Majha. The required primary data were collected from the sampled households through the well prepared questionnaire. Since the majority of the Dalit woman labourers were illiterate, it was decided to fill questionnaires-cum-schedules through the interview method. The results were analysed by using the mean values and percentages.

Results and Discussion

The political participation of Dalit woman labourers has been analysed under the following two heads:

- Political awareness;
- Political involvement

Political awareness

Political awareness depends upon the information pertaining to the political system - knowledge about the State Legislative Assemblies, Legislative Councils, Chief Minister, Governor, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, Prime Minister, President, Parliamentary democracy, party system, ideologies of the different political parties, the process of election, the franchise as well as the knowledge of local (urban and rural) self-governments. It could be a good tool to know how much women are socially active and concerned about the political set-up and change in that area [9]. In the case of Dalit woman labourers, it is important because it is directly associated with their development. As per Table 1, majority of the respondent woman labourers, i.e., 95.90 per cent were not interested in politics. Only a small proportion of the respondents, i.e., 2.81 per cent were somewhat interested in politics, while 1.29 per cent respondents had their interest in politics (Table 1).

Table 1: Awareness of Dalit woman laborers about political aspects.

Response	Number of Dalit woman labourers			
	Malwa	Doaba	Majha	Punjab
1. Interest in politics				
Yes	4 (1.08)	3 (1.23)	5 (1.60)	12 (1.29)
No	357 (96.49)	234 (96.30)	298 (94.90)	889 (95.90)
Somewhat	9 (2.43)	6 (2.47)	11 (3.50)	26 (2.81)
Total	370 (100.00)	243 (100.00)	314 (100.00)	927 (100.00)

2. Reading, listening and watching news				
Yes	22 (5.95)	11 (4.53)	18 (5.73)	51 (5.50)
No	348 (94.05)	232 (95.47)	296 (94.27)	876 (94.50)
Total	370 (100.00)	243 (100.00)	314 (100.00)	927 (100.00)
3. Satisfaction with their existing political representation				
No	39 (10.54)	17 (7.00)	28 (8.92)	84 (9.06)
Somewhat	4 (1.08)	3 (1.23)	4 (1.27)	11 (1.19)
Don't know	327 (88.38)	223 (91.77)	282 (89.81)	832 (89.75)
Total	370 (100.00)	243 (100.00)	314 (100.00)	927 (100.00)
4. Participation of women from community/area of respondents in Punjab Legislative Assembly election				
Yes	11 (2.98)	6 (2.47)	8 (2.55)	25 (2.70)
No	238 (64.32)	156 (64.20)	203 (64.65)	597 (64.40)
Don't know	121 (32.70)	81 (33.33)	103 (32.80)	305 (32.90)
Total	370 (100.00)	243 (100.00)	314 (100.00)	927 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey, 2016-17

Note: The figures given in parentheses indicate percentages.

A vast majority of the respondents, i.e., 94.50 per cent did not read, listen and watch the news, whereas the remaining 5.50 per cent respondents took it otherwise. It was found during the field survey that most of them remained occupied in their domestic chores. Being illiterate, most of them were not able to read the newspapers. Illiteracy was the main factor which deprived them of being politically empowered. Because of the lack of understanding, they did not know even about their basic and political rights [10]. In response to their existing political representation both at the state or central level, surprisingly 89.75 per cent of the respondents had no idea about it, and 9.06 per cent respondents were found to be not satisfied with the current level of representation. Only 1.19 per cent respondents were satisfied with their representation in the political arena. As to their participation in the Punjab Legislative Assembly election, only 2.70 per cent of the respondents responded positively, while 64.40 per cent revealed that there was no woman candidate from their community/area who participated in the previous election. It is pertinent to note that about one-third of the respondents, i.e., 32.90 per cent knew nothing about this aspect. The region-wise data showing awareness of the Dalit woman labourers about political aspects revealed that out of the total respondents, 96.49, 96.30, and 94.90 per cent were not interested in politics in Malwa, Doaba, and Majha respectively. A small proportion of the

respondents, i.e., 3.50 per cent in Majha, 2.47 per cent in Doaba and 2.43 per cent in Malwa were interested in politics to some extent. Only 1.60, 1.23, and 1.08 per cent respondents had shown their interest in politics in Majha, Doaba, and Malwa respectively. A vast majority of the Dalit woman labourers, i.e., 95.47, 94.27, and 94.05 per cent were not reading, listening and watching the news in Doaba, Majha, and Malwa respectively. Only 5.95 per cent respondents in Malwa, 5.73 per cent in Majha and 4.53 per cent in Doaba took interest in reading, listening or watching the news. Further, majority of the respondents, i.e., 91.77 per cent in Doaba, 89.81 per cent in Majha and 88.38 per cent in Malwa knew nothing about their present political representation either at the state or central level. A very small proportion of the respondents, i.e., 10.54 per cent respondents in Malwa, 8.92 per cent in Majha and 7.00 per cent in Doaba were found to be not satisfied with the present level of women political representation. Only 1.27, 1.23, and 1.08 per cent were somewhat satisfied in this regard in Majha, Doaba, and Malwa respectively. Majority of the respondents stated that no woman candidate from their community/area participated in the Punjab State Assembly elections in all the three regions. Such respondents were 64.65 per cent in Majha, 64.32 per cent in Malwa and 63.20 per cent in Doaba. Only a small proportion of the respondents, i.e., 2.98, 2.55, and 2.47 per cent responded positively in this regard in

Malwa, Majha, and Doaba respectively. About one-third of the respondents, i.e., 33.33 per cent in Doaba, 32.80 per cent in Majha and 32.70 per cent in Malwa knew nothing in this regard. In order to assess their political awareness, the respondents were asked to tell the names of the persons occupying important political positions at the state and central level. The data given in Table 2 revealed that a vast majority of the respondents, i.e., 92.45 per cent did not know even the name of the Chief Minister of Punjab, whereas 5.18 per cent knew it partially. Only a meagre proportion of the respondents, i.e., 2.37 per cent knew the name of the Chief Minister of Punjab. Similarly, a vast majority of the respondents, i.e., 94.50 per cent failed to tell the name of the

Prime Minister of the country, while only 3.34 per cent partially knew about it. A small proportion of the respondents, i.e., 2.16 per cent knew the name of the Prime Minister of the country. It indicated that the Prime Minister's 'Mann ki Baat' had not reached the Dalit woman labourers in the rural areas. The table further revealed that almost all the respondents, i.e., 99.57 per cent did not know about the name of the President of India. Further, majority of the respondents, i.e., 86.19 per cent failed to mention the names of any two female political leaders of the state, while 81.23 per cent had no knowledge about the names of various political parties in India (Table 2).

Table 2: Awareness of Dalit woman laborers regarding the name of persons occupying important political positions.

Particulars	Response	Number of Dalit woman labourers			
		Malwa	Doaba	Majha	Punjab
Name of State's Chief Minister	Don't know	343 (92.70)	224 (92.18)	290 (92.36)	857 (92.45)
	Know	9 (2.44)	6 (2.47)	7 (2.23)	22 (2.37)
	Partially know	18 (4.86)	13 (5.35)	17 (5.41)	48 (5.18)
Name of Country's Prime Minister	Don't know	351 (94.86)	229 (94.24)	296 (94.27)	876 (94.50)
	Know	8 (2.16)	5 (2.06)	7 (2.23)	20 (2.16)
	Partially know	11 (2.98)	9 (3.70)	11 (3.50)	31 (3.34)
Name of Country's President	Don't know	368 (99.46)	242 (99.59)	313 (99.68)	923 (99.57)
	Know	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
	Partially know	2 (0.54)	1 (0.41)	1 (0.32)	4 (0.43)
Name of Two female political leaders	Don't know	330 (89.19)	205 (84.36)	264 (84.08)	799 (86.19)
	Know	11 (2.97)	14 (5.76)	18 (5.73)	43 (4.64)
	Partially know	29 (7.84)	24 (9.88)	32 (10.19)	85 (9.17)
Name of Various political parties in India	Don't know	298 (80.54)	188 (77.37)	267 (85.03)	753 (81.23)
	Know	26 (7.03)	19 (7.82)	16 (5.10)	61 (6.58)
	Partially know	46 (12.43)	36 (14.81)	31 (9.87)	113 (12.19)

Source: Field Survey, 2016-17

Note: The figures given in parentheses indicate percentages.

The region-wise analysis brought out that a vast majority of the respondents, i.e., 92.70 per cent in Malwa, 92.36 per cent in Majha and 92.18 per cent in Doaba did not know even the name of the Chief Minister of Punjab. Some of them partially knew about it. Such respondents were represented by 5.41 per cent in

Majha, 5.35 per cent in Doaba and 4.86 per cent in Malwa. However, only 2.47 per cent respondents in Doaba, 2.44 per cent in Malwa and 2.23 per cent in Majha correctly knew the name of the Chief Minister of Punjab. Similarly, a large majority of the respondents, i.e., 94.86, 94.27, and 94.24 per cent failed to reveal

the name of the Prime Minister of the country in Malwa, Majha, and Doaba respectively. Some of the respondents, i.e., 3.70 per cent in Doaba, 3.50 per cent in Majha and 2.98 per cent in Malwa only partially knew the name of the Prime Minister of the country. Only a small proportion of the respondents, i.e., 2.23 per cent in Majha, 2.16 per cent in Malwa and 2.06 per cent in Doaba correctly knew about the name of the Prime Minister of the country. The table further revealed that almost all the respondents in all the three regions had no idea about the name of the President of the country. Only two respondents in Malwa, one each in the other two regions, i.e., Doaba and Majha partially knew the name of the President of the country. Again, majority of the respondents, i.e., 89.19, 84.36, and 84.08 per cent did not know the names of any two female political leaders of the state in Malwa, Doaba, and Majha respectively. Besides, about four-fifths of the respondents, i.e., 85.03 per cent in Majha, 80.54 per cent in Malwa and 77.37 per cent in Doaba did not know even the names of various political parties in India.

Political Involvement

The term ‘political involvement’ has a very wide meaning. It is the involvement of individual at the various levels in the political system. Voting ensures political participation of an individual. The data regarding casting of votes by the respondent woman labourers in the elections is given in Table 3. A vast majority of the respondents, i.e., 96.22 per cent exercised their right to vote in the state assembly elections. The remaining 3.78 per cent

respondents did not exercise their voting right. Further, 82.96 per cent of the respondents stated that they exercised their voting right without any kind of pressure, whereas 13.26 per cent respondents had the pressure of casting their vote to a particular candidate. No doubt, the Dalit women actively participated in the political process, but majority of them failed to cast their votes according to their own choice. They remained under the influence of others in this regard. They were not even free to decide whether to vote or not at the time of polling [11]. The analysis further provided that more than three-fourths, i.e., 77.89 per cent of the Dalit woman labourers exercised their vote to right after the decision of their senior male family members. This fact was supported by the empirical finding of another research study which showed that in majority of the cases, advice of the male elders was necessary while voting by the Dalit women [12]. In fact, head of the family exerted a dominant influence on all the female members. It was further noted that married women were influenced by their husbands, whereas unmarried women remained under the influence of their fathers while forming an opinion with respect to their political participation [7]. Some of the respondents, i.e., 7.98 per cent were under the influence of some shopkeepers/traders/money-lenders at the time of exercising their vote. As many as 6.47 per cent of the respondents remained under the influence of religious leaders. Another 3.88 per cent of the respondent woman labourers cast their vote under the influence of their employers/landlords (Table 3).

Table 3: Responses of Dalit woman laborers regarding casting votes.

Particulars	Response	Number of Dalit woman labourers			
		Malwa	Doaba	Majha	Punjab
Casting vote	Yes	357 (96.49)	233 (95.88)	302 (96.18)	892 (96.22)
	No	13 (3.51)	10 (4.12)	12 (3.82)	35 (3.78)
	Total	370 (100.00)	243 (100.00)	314 (100.00)	927 (100.00)
Without any pressure	Yes	313 (84.59)	202 (83.13)	254 (80.89)	769 (82.96)
	No	44 (11.90)	31 (12.75)	48 (15.29)	123 (13.26)
	Not applicable	13 (3.51)	10 (4.12)	12 (3.82)	35 (3.78)
	Total	370 (100.00)	243 (100.00)	314 (100.00)	927 (100.00)
Voted under influence	Senior male family members	294 (79.46)	194 (79.84)	234 (74.52)	722 (77.89)
	Employers/landlords	9 (2.43)	12 (4.94)	15 (4.78)	36 (3.88)
	Shopkeepers/traders/ money-lenders	23 (6.22)	13 (5.35)	38 (12.10)	74 (7.98)
	Religious leaders	31	14	15	60

		(8.38)	(5.75)	(4.78)	(6.47)
	Not applicable	13 (3.51)	10 (4.12)	12 (3.82)	35 (3.78)
	Total	370 (100.00)	243 (100.00)	314 (100.00)	927 (100.00)
Source: Field Survey, 2016-17					
Note: The figures given in parentheses indicate percentages.					

The region-wise analysis revealed that a vast majority of the respondents, i.e., 96.49 per cent in Malwa, 96.18 per cent in Majha and 95.88 per cent in Doaba cast their vote in the state assembly elections. Only 4.12, 3.82, and 3.51 per cent respondents did not exercise their voting right in Majha, Doaba and Malwa respectively. Further, out of the total respondents, 84.59 per cent in Malwa, 83.13 per cent in Doaba and 80.89 per cent in Majha cast their vote without any sort of pressure, whereas 15.29, 12.75, and 11.90 per cent respondents cast their vote under the pressure of others in Majha, Doaba, and Malwa respectively.

The analysis provided as hereunder:

- Around three-fourths of the Dalit woman labourers, i.e., 79.84 per cent in Doaba, 79.46 per cent in Malwa and 74.52 per cent in Majha cast their vote as per the choice of their senior male family members;
- Some of the respondents, i.e., 12.10, 6.22, and 5.35 per cent cast their vote under the influence of shopkeepers/traders/money-lenders in Majha, Malwa, and Doaba respectively;
- The religious leaders influenced the voting decision of 8.38 per cent of the respondents in Malwa, 5.75 per cent in Doaba and 4.78 per cent in Majha. During the field survey, it was also observed that the family members of woman labour households in Malwa were relatively under greater influence of the religious leaders as compared to the other two regions; and
- As many as 4.94, 4.78, and 2.43 per cent of the respondents cast their vote under the pressure of their employers/landlords in Doaba, Majha, and Malwa respectively. This fact matched the finding of another research study which showed that the Dalit woman labourers had to work and live under the constant fear of the dominant landlord community of the area. Such women, in case of their defiance, always felt the fear of losing access to the fields of landlords for collecting the fodder, and other product [13].

The field survey provided that majority of the respondent woman labourers in all the three regions under study cast their votes

under the influence of their senior male family members. But some of these male family members acted upon the advice of shopkeepers/traders/money-lenders, employers/landlords, and religious leaders in this regard. Generally, there is a unanimous decision with respect to the political participation of the families in rural areas. It is taken up by the senior male members, and everybody in the family follows this decision without any questioning. Women take little interest in such matters. This has made their participation insignificant. As per Table 4, a vast majority of the respondents, i.e., 97.30 per cent had no inclination to be elected as a representative of any political body. Only 2.70 per cent respondents gave a positive response in this regard. It was observed that these respondents felt disappointed over this issue. The following responses made in this regard are indicative of their disappointment:

- “*asi ane joge kithe*” (We are not so well off);
- “*hun tan agle janam vich dekhange*” (We hope to see our dream fulfilled in the next world); and
- “*gareeban nu kon moaka dinda?*” (Who gives a chance to the poor?).

This fact of the study is similar to the one brought out. The Dalit woman labourers find no place in the Indian political system. Their participation in the electoral process is generally lesser than that of their counterparts [14]. Another empirical study has shown that the Dalit women elected in panchayats are discriminated on the basis of caste, and gender. The socio-economic background, and lack of education and information about the political system are the other factors which act as barrier in their all-around development [4]. Majority of the respondents, i.e., 88.89 per cent were not capable of convincing the other women to participate in politics. Only a small proportion of the respondents, i.e., 8.31 per cent were able to convince other women to some extent in this regard. Only 2.80 per cent respondents had the confidence of convincing the other women to participate in politics. In villages, only a limited number of Dalit’s are educated, but they are unemployed, and poor. Because of these reasons, they are not heard justifiably [15] (Table 4).

Table 4: Involvement of Dalit woman laborers in politics.

Response	Number of Dalit woman labourers			
	Malwa	Doaba	Majha	Punjab
1. Inclination to be elected as a representative in the elections				
Yes	12 (3.24)	6 (2.47)	7 (2.23)	25 (2.70)
No	358 (96.76)	237 (97.53)	307 (97.77)	902 (97.30)
Total	370 (100.00)	243 (100.00)	314 (100.00)	927 (100.00)
2. Capacity to convince other women for participation in politics				
Yes	13 (3.51)	7 (2.88)	6 (1.91)	26 (2.80)
No	336 (90.81)	210 (86.42)	278 (88.54)	824 (88.89)
To some extent	21 (5.68)	26 (10.70)	30 (9.55)	77 (8.31)
Total	370 (100.00)	243 (100.00)	314 (100.00)	927 (100.00)
3. Participation in political campaign/public assemblies				
Yes	7 (1.89)	4 (1.65)	5 (1.59)	16 (1.73)
No	363 (98.11)	239 (98.35)	309 (98.41)	911 (98.27)
Total	370 (100.00)	243 (100.00)	314 (100.00)	927 (100.00)
4. Access to political leaders of the community/area for seeking a solution to their problems				
Yes	21 (5.68)	11 (4.53)	0 (0.00)	32 (3.45)
No	349 (94.32)	232 (95.47)	314 (100.00)	895 (96.55)
Total	370 (100.00)	243 (100.00)	314 (100.00)	927 (100.00)
5. Should women be the President/ Prime Minister of the country?				
Yes	237 (64.05)	183 (75.31)	188 (59.87)	608 (65.59)
No	133 (35.95)	60 (24.69)	126 (40.13)	319 (34.41)
Total	370 (100.00)	243 (100.00)	314 (100.00)	927 (100.00)
6. Should women work as political workers of the political parties?				
Yes	8 (2.16)	5 (2.06)	13 (4.14)	26 (2.80)
No	362 (97.84)	238 (97.94)	301 (95.86)	901 (97.20)
Total	370 (100.00)	243 (100.00)	314 (100.00)	927 (100.00)
Source: Field Survey, 2016-17				
Note: The figures given in parentheses indicate percentages.				

A vast majority of the respondents, i.e., 98.27 per cent never participated in any political campaign/public assembly. The Dalit women generally remained away from taking any political decision. They always contested the elections under the shadow of fear. The representation of Dalit women to the local governing

bodies is mandatory under 73rd amendment of the constitution. They are elected, but not able to exercise their power [16]. It was further observed from the field survey that the Dalit woman labourers had to perform the duty at their workplace and in the family as well. In almost all the cases, their male counterparts did

not share the domestic responsibilities. As a result, they were unable to attend any political campaign/public meeting. Again, majority of the respondents, i.e., 96.55 per cent have never been to the political leaders of their community/area for seeking a solution to their problems. Only 3.45 per cent respondents responded positively in this regard. Further, about two-thirds of the respondents, i.e., 65.59 per cent expressed to have a woman as the President/Prime Minister of India, whereas the remaining 34.41 per cent respondents had a different view in this regard. Surprisingly, majority of the respondents, i.e., 97.20 per cent had no interest to work as workers of political parties, while the remaining 2.80 per cent respondents had a different view in this regards. The region-wise analysis regarding this issue provided that majority of the respondents, i.e., 97.77 per cent in Majha, 97.53 per cent in Doaba and 96.76 per cent in Malwa had no inclination to be elected as a representative of any political body, even if given a chance. Out of the total respondents, only 3.24 per cent in Malwa, 2.47 per cent in Doaba and 2.23 per cent in Majha responded positively in this regard. Similarly, majority of the respondents, i.e., 90.81 per cent in Malwa, 88.54 per cent in Majha and 86.42 per cent in Doaba were not capable of convincing other women to participate in politics. However, a small proportion of the respondents, i.e., 10.70, 9.55, and 5.68 per cent were found to be somewhat confident in this regard in Doaba, Majha, and Malwa respectively. Only 3.51 per cent respondents in Malwa, 2.88 per cent in Doaba and 1.91 per cent in Majha were confident of convincing the other women to participate in politics. Further, a vast majority of the respondents, i.e., 98.41 per cent in Majha, 98.35 per cent in Doaba and 98.11 per cent in Malwa never participated in any political campaign/public assembly. On the other hand, only 1.89, 1.65, and 1.59 per cent respondents participated in such a type of campaign/ assembly in Malwa, Doaba, and Majha respectively. Again, all the respondents in Majha reported that they had no access to the political leaders of their community/area for seeking a solution to their problems. These proportions are 95.47 per cent in Doaba and 94.32 per cent in Malwa. On the other hand, 5.68 per cent respondents in Malwa and 4.53 per cent in Doaba responded positively in this regard. As many as 75.31 per cent respondents in Doaba favoured a woman to be the President/Prime Minister of the country. The similar percentages for Malwa and Majha were 64.05 and 59.87 respectively. On the other hand, 40.13 per cent respondents in Majha, 35.95 per cent in Malwa and 24.69 per cent in Doaba had a different view in this regard. Most of the respondents, i.e., 97.94 per cent in Doaba, 97.84 per cent in Malwa and 95.86 per cent in Majha did not favour to be a worker of any political party. On the other hand, a small proportion of the respondents, i.e., 4.14, 2.16, and 2.06 per cent had a different view on this issue in Majha, Malwa, and Doaba respectively.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has clearly brought out that a vast majority of the respondent woman labourers were not interested in politics. They did not read, listen and watch the news as most of them remained occupied in their domestic chores. Being illiterate, most of them were not able to read the newspapers. Thus, a vast majority of the respondents did not know even the name of the Chief Minister of Punjab or the Prime Minister of the country. However, a vast majority of the respondents, i.e., 96.22 per cent exercised their right to vote in the state assembly elections. No doubt, the Dalit women actively participated in the political process, but majority of them failed to cast their votes according to their own choice. Most of them cast their vote as per the decision of their elder male family members. Some of the respondents were also influenced by the advice of some shopkeepers/traders/money-lenders, religious leaders, and employers/landlords. A vast majority of the respondents never participated in any political campaign. It was further observed that the Dalit woman labourers had to perform the duty at their workplace and in the family as well. In almost all the cases, their male counterparts did not share the domestic responsibilities. As a result, they were unable to attend any political/public meeting. Further, a vast majority of the respondents, i.e., 97.30 per cent had no inclination to be elected as a representative of any political body. But they felt disappointed over this issue. Their responses such as “*asi ane joge kithe*” (We are not so well off), “*hun tan agle janam vich dekhange*” (We hope to see our dream fulfilled in the next world) and “*gareeban nu kon moaka dinda?*” (Who gives a chance to the poor?) Were indicative of their disappointment and exclusion from the Indian political system.

Policy Implications

The implications arising out of the results of this study are described as follows:

- The study has revealed that a very large majority of the respondent woman labourers, i.e., 95.90 per cent have no interest in politics. Their participation in the political process is nominal only. So, there is an urgent need to create a healthy socio- economic and political environment to increase the participation of these women.
- In a democracy, voting ascertains the success or failure of a candidate. But, some of the Dalit woman labourers and their family members, at the time of elections, are easily influenced to cast their vote by the choice of certain shopkeepers/traders/money-lenders, religious leaders, and employers/landlords. Thus, such woman labourers need to be educated properly for enabling them to cast their votes freely and without any influence.

- It has been observed that the family members of Dalit woman labour households especially in Malwa are relatively more under the influence of religious leaders as compared to the other two regions. These people, being illiterate and ignorant, fall in their trap easily; and the decision of such religious leaders prevails at the time of elections. These innocent people need to be made aware about the evil designs of such religious leaders. It is essential to strength the roots of democracy.
 - The government should ensure the participation of Dalit woman labourers against the reserved seats for women in the local elections. Their participation in the state elections is also equally important. The woman representatives need to be given special training to increase their knowledge and confidence while performing new responsibilities.
 - It has been found from the field survey that some Dalit labour unions are trying to organize the labourers to fight for their rights. These unions of the landless Dalit labourers have raised their voice to allocate common land of the villages to such poor people of the society. The success of co-operative farming on leased-in village common land has led to fulfil their needs of food grains, vegetables, green and dry fodder, and the like. This success can be attributed to their growing spirit of co-operation. They move forward with the slogan: each for all, all for each.
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