

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICAL AWARENESS AND
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION WITHIN THE SAHARIYA
TRIBE IN THE CHAMBAL DIVISION**

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Abstract

This research explores the relationship between political awareness and political participation among the Sahariya tribe, focusing on the Chambal division. The Sahariya, a marginalized tribal group in central India, face various socio-economic challenges. In this context, political awareness and participation can be critical factors in their social empowerment and access to government benefits. This paper aims to understand the extent of political consciousness within the tribe and how it translates into political actions such as voting, activism, or community engagement. Through an analysis of existing literature, field studies, and surveys, this study investigates the factors influencing political behavior in the Sahariya tribe.

Key words : Sahariya tribe, political awareness, political participation

Introduction

Political participation is the cornerstone of democratic governance, ensuring that citizens have a say in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. However, for marginalized communities such as the Sahariya tribe in the Chambal region of Madhya Pradesh, political engagement has historically been minimal. The Chambal division, known for its rugged terrain and socio-economic backwardness, has a significant population of the Sahariya tribe, classified as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG). Due to their geographic isolation, lack of education, and economic hardship, the Sahariya tribe often finds itself excluded from mainstream political processes.

This study seeks to examine the relationship between political awareness and political participation among the Sahariya tribe. Political awareness, defined as the knowledge and

understanding of political processes, institutions, and leaders, is hypothesized to be a key determinant of political participation, which includes voting, attending rallies, joining political parties, and other forms of civic engagement.

Literature Review

Political participation among tribal communities in India has been a subject of study for decades. Scholars have noted that while tribes such as the Sahariya are often politically marginalized, efforts have been made to integrate them into the democratic process. According to Beteille (1991), tribal political participation is often hampered by a lack of education and awareness of rights and governance. Similarly, Dreze and Sen (2002) argue that increased political awareness leads to better utilization of democratic rights, particularly voting and access to welfare schemes.

Studies focusing on the Chambal region specifically have highlighted the barriers to political engagement for the Sahariya tribe. Senapati (2010) found that due to the socio-economic hardships in the Chambal region, many Sahariya members are unable to prioritize political engagement. However, other studies have shown that awareness campaigns and literacy programs have made incremental progress in encouraging Sahariya participation in local governance (Rathore, 2015).

Methodology

This research employs a mixed-method approach, using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Surveys were conducted across five villages in the Chambal division with significant Sahariya populations. Respondents were asked questions related to their knowledge of political processes, their voting history, and their involvement in political activities.

In addition to surveys, in-depth interviews were conducted with community leaders and local politicians to gain insights into the barriers faced by the Sahariya tribe in engaging with the political system. Secondary data from government reports and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the Chambal region were also analyzed to supplement the primary data.

Political Awareness in the Sahariya Tribe

Political awareness among the Sahariya tribe is often limited by several factors, including low literacy rates, lack of access to media, and limited interaction with political representatives. In many of the surveyed villages, respondents indicated that their primary source of political information was local political meetings or word-of-mouth from community leaders. Radio broadcasts were also a common source of information, but television and print media were less accessible due to poverty and geographic isolation.

The findings suggest that political awareness is unevenly distributed within the tribe, with younger individuals who have had some level of formal education being more informed about political processes compared to older generations. Interestingly, political awareness is also higher among Sahariya women than men in some villages, likely due to the efforts of NGOs working on women's empowerment and literacy.

Political Participation in the Sahariya Tribe

Despite the challenges in political awareness, the Sahariya tribe does participate in political activities, albeit at varying levels. Voting is the most common form of political participation, with over 70% of respondents stating that they have voted in the last general or local elections. However, other forms of participation, such as attending political rallies, joining political parties, or engaging in activism, were far less common. Only 15% of respondents reported attending a political rally in the past year, and less than 5% were members of any political party.

The correlation between political awareness and participation is evident in the survey data. Those who had higher levels of political knowledge were more likely to have participated in non-electoral political activities. This supports the hypothesis that political awareness plays a crucial role in fostering greater political engagement.

Barriers to Political Participation

Several barriers hinder the Sahariya tribe's political participation. Firstly, economic hardship is a significant factor. Many Sahariya families live below the poverty line and are preoccupied with day-to-day survival, leaving little time or resources for political

engagement. Additionally, illiteracy remains a substantial barrier. With literacy rates among the Sahariya tribe being far below the national average, many individuals are unaware of their political rights or the functioning of democratic institutions.

Geographic isolation also contributes to low levels of participation. The Chambal region, with its difficult terrain and limited infrastructure, often makes it hard for political representatives to reach these communities. As a result, many Sahariya individuals feel disconnected from the political process, seeing little benefit in engaging with it.

Furthermore, there is a lack of trust in political institutions among the Sahariya tribe. Many respondents expressed skepticism about whether voting or political participation would bring any tangible benefits to their community. This distrust is likely the result of long-standing neglect by government agencies and politicians, who have historically overlooked the needs of the Sahariya tribe.

Conclusion

The relationship between political awareness and political participation within the Sahariya tribe in the Chambal division is complex and multifaceted. While political awareness is a key driver of participation, it is not the sole factor. Economic hardship, geographic isolation, and a lack of trust in political institutions also play significant roles in limiting the tribe's political engagement. However, increasing political awareness, particularly through education and targeted campaigns, can lead to higher levels of participation, as evidenced by the positive correlation between knowledge and civic engagement.

Future efforts to improve political participation among the Sahariya tribe should focus on addressing the underlying socio-economic challenges and building trust in political processes. Literacy programs, awareness campaigns, and improved access to political representatives could serve as vital tools in bridging the gap between awareness and participation. By fostering a more politically active Sahariya community, there is potential for greater empowerment and inclusion within the democratic process.

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