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**SOCIO-ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF THE VOTERS OF PUNJAB**

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*India is a vast country based on democratic setup. According to a former president of U.S.A. the meaning of democracy is, "Govt. Of the people for the people and by the people." In a democratic country periodic elections are held from time to time. In India many factors played a role to determine the voting behaviour of the people. In this study, a survey was conducted on 210 voters of Punjab. Many questions were asked from voters about the factors which influenced them to participated in the present Punjab Lok Sabha elections held in April 2014. So this study shows the issues and factors responsible for the voting behaviour of people of Punjab.*

**Introduction**

Background features of an electorate play an important role in formulating the ideas, attitudes, perceptions, preferences and decisions of the voters. Therefore franchise is used in a democratic system by different strata in society for different objectives for different candidates. Socio-economic background thus is considered as an alternative explanation of voting. Almost all meaningful studies of voting behaviour have dealt with both political and socio-economic factors as voting determinates. In general, such studies in the more developed countries, where most electoral research has been carried on, give special attention to political factors, whereas electoral studies in developing countries tend to stress upon the socio-economic factors. It has therefore become important in electoral studies to analyse the socio-economic background of the voters.

Socio-economic traits and environment facts accompanied by time-spirit are the determining factors. They contribute to formulate one's attitude or action. So it is required that the 'electorate' should possess these additions so that they may have a particular kind of socio-economic background. Among the socio-economic factors are included literacy, education, income, material status, age, sex, caste and like for an analysis of the voting pattern<sup>1</sup>.

Gunnar Sjoblom a Swedish socio-logist writes, "The socio-economic factors are in most instances dominant for in voting behaviour."<sup>2</sup> Hence these variables are used as background data to illustrate the

social variations of the electorate located in different areas. They are also used as explanatory variables to explain variation among electorate on some chosen dimensions pertaining to political attitudes and voting patterns<sup>3</sup>.

Voting is an act which cannot be accomplished in a vacuum. Social environment affects the political orientations and preferences of the electorate because the political process is itself a part of the social system, So we can say that socio-economic background produces both the negative and positive effects. Paul P. Lazarsfeld and Berelson write, "A person thinks politically as he is socially". In fact social environment determines the political preferences<sup>4</sup>.

In this respect Sarlvik a Swedish author, also argues that background variables effect behaviour through the mediation of other factors which are themselves casually related<sup>5</sup>. In a sense this idea is nearer to Marx who once said that socio-economic structure determines the super structure of political institutions or orientations of the people. It does not mean that as conditioning factors they are not relevant for explaining various patterns of voting behavior. It is predicted that information on background variables yields satisfying results<sup>6</sup>.

The analysis of socio-economic background is all the more important in a country like India where considerations of caste and kinship still effect the social behaviour and where there is vast difference in the social and economic status of the individuals. The main variables that have been taken into considerations in the present study are, caste, age, sex, occupation, literacy, religion, income etc. The total number of respondents taken for this purposes was 210.

### **Caste**

Caste as stated above, plays a dominant role in Indian political and electoral system. Caste is rather the first and the major factor which influences the behaviour of the voters to a considerable extent. Morris Jones has rightly said that in India, politics is more important to caste and castes are more important to politics than before caste, therefore, is a significant variables in determining the voting pattern of the voters. This is despite the fact that caste has been acquiring some changes and in some caste cases declining as a political and social force<sup>7</sup>. One author has remarked that "Caste is the most prominent factor which influences the voting behaviour of the electorate in India<sup>8</sup>". To quote Kini, caste implies a subjective psychological reality, which influences the behaviour of voter. Caste is considered a social stratum to which an individual belongs by birth, caste is social group to which an individual belongs and

which determines his political preferences. Hence caste have become a political category which determining the distribution of power in society and polity<sup>9</sup>.

**Table No. 1 Distribution of Respondents Cast wise**

Sr. No.	Caste	Total No. of Respondent	%age
1.	Brahmine	18	8.57
2.	Jat Sikh	114	54.29
3.	SC	14	6.67
4.	ST	6	2.86
5.	Khatries	20	9.52
6.	Vaish	20	9.52
7.	N.R.	18	8.57
	<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>100</b>

As Paul Brass observes, "The role of caste in elections is easily the most discussed aspect of contemporary Indian political society."<sup>10</sup> Muslims did not reply about caste and leaving Sikhs, all others called themselves Hindus. So, it can be said that 54.29 per cent respondents were Jat Sikh further divided into sub-castes.

### **Age**

Age is yet another variable in determining the voting behaviour of the voter. It is usually believed that older people tend to be more conservative in their voting habits and younger are more radical<sup>11</sup>. So young people show larger enthusiasm for elections than the old people<sup>12</sup>. This is particularly important to consider considering that in India half of the voters are under thirty-five years of age. It will now become even more important because the government has lowered the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen years. It is for this reason that the political parties try to field younger candidates in the election fray<sup>13</sup>. It is generally admitted that the larger the proportion of the younger electorate, the greater the uncertainty of the election outcome. This idea is based on the assumption that participation is dependent on two factors. First, the younger electorate who enter the electoral process for the first time, may not have any political affiliation. In the second place, the learning process is reinforced by the transmission of appropriate political orientations from the parents and elderly family members to the electorate of younger generation. Children learn social norms of behaviour, to some extent, from their

family when they become adults. They cast their vote usually to the party which was supported by their parents.

**Table No. 2 Distribution of Respondents Age wise**

Sr. No.	Age	Total No. of Respondent	%age
1.	18-30	20	9.53
2.	31-41	102	48.57
3.	41-50	70	33.33
4.	51 and above	18	8.57

It is revealed from the above table that 58.1 respondents belong to Young age group of 18 to 40 years only 18 (8.57%) respondents belong to elderly age group of above 50 years. 70 (33.33%) respondents belong to the middle age group of 41 to 50 years.

### Sex

Sex variable is also very important to determine the voting behaviour of the electorate. From the sex point of view males outnumber the females because women in Indian society are believed to be non-voters. They tend to participate in voting and other electoral activities less frequently than men. Due to their traditional attitudes still confine themselves to the four walls of the household and are not active participants in the political life. It is probably true of other developed countries. But even in the U.S.A. where women have been granted equal franchise, for the past several decades they still have not reached the point where as many of them vote as men<sup>14</sup>. Herber Tingston has written, "At every social level women vote less than men. This is true in national elections and in social elections in Europe and in the United States."<sup>15</sup>

**Table No. 3: Distribution of Respondents Sex wise**

Sr. No.	Sex	Total No. of Respondent	%age
1.	Male	188	89.52
2.	Female	22	10.48
	<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>100</b>

## Education

Educational level of the voters is one of the best indications of the socio-economic background. It has been a crucial variable in determining the party affiliation. It is believed that illiterate voters go for status quo, whereas the younger educated voters prefer change for better administration<sup>16</sup>. Educated people, it is believed are more knowledgeable in regard to the problems of the society and policies of various political parties and their manifestoes whereas the illiterate people do not have the necessary capabilities of understanding public affairs. Some educated people do not take their decision independently and they cast their votes in favour of any political party which is successful in influencing them through various techniques. It is generally believed that educated voter casts his vote after considering the merits and demerits of a political party. That is why education is considered so important in a democratic process. It is expected of the voters that they will cast their votes with responsibility. Seymour Lipset supports this view that education is a necessary condition for democracy<sup>17</sup>. See Table No. 4. for details.

The above table reveals that about 90 (42.86%) respondents were either illiterate or semi-literate, 120 (57.14%) were post-graduates and professionals. Thus a sizeable number 60 (57.05%) were literate respondents. A majority of the servicemen and self-employed were postgraduates or had professional degrees. Amongst the uneducated were labourers and petty shopkeepers. Other shopkeepers and businessmen were either semi-literate or literate.

**Table No. 4      Distribution of Respondents Education level wise**

Sr. No.	Level of Edu.	Total No. of Respondent	%age
1.	Uneducated	48	22.86
2.	Primary	16	7.62
3.	Matriculates	26	12.38
4.	BA/B/Sc.	42	20
5.	Post Graduate	50	23.81
6.	Any other	28	13.33
	<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>100</b>

### Occupation

Occupation is also an important variable in determining the voting preferences. As far as occupation is concerned, it is very difficult to classify the occupation in a concrete list because of its enormous diversity. It is possible that a voter may earn his living by following more than one occupation. Hence it is impossible to identify the particular occupation with any particular party or choice<sup>18</sup>. Despite these problems, it is beneficial to have a look at the occupation background of the voters.

**Table No. 5: Distribution of Respondents Occupation wise**

Sr. No.	Occupation	Total No. of Respondent	%age
1.	Petty Shopkeeper	54	25.71
2.	Service	60	28.58
3.	Self Employed	50	23.81
4.	Labour	28	13.33
5.	Businessman	18	8.57
	<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>100</b>

### Income

Income or economic status of the voters also is very important in determining the voting behaviour of the electorate. It is believed that non-voting tendency is much higher in the higher economic status group. A poor person is more occupied with the procurement of food twice a day than political rights. Gordon M. Connelly and Harry H. Field however, say that more economic security and education a person has, the more he is likely to participate in elections<sup>19</sup>. From the economic status point view respondents have been divided into three categories.

**Table No. 6 Distribution of Respondents Income level wise**

Sr. No.	Income	Total No. of Respondent	%age
1.	Lower Income	74	35.23
2.	Middle Income	106	50.48
3.	Upper Income	30	14.29
	<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>100</b>

At the outset, it may be mentioned that it was difficult to make an assessment of the income of the respondents. They were not in a mood to part with the details of their property and other material possessions. Only servicemen and labourers came openly to tell their earnings. Anyhow, the table reveals that 74 (35.23%) respondents belonged to the low income group more particularly comprising of labourers and petty shopkeepers; 106 (50.48%) fall in the middle income group comprising of self-employed, service people; 30 (14.29%) were in the upper middle income group comprising of businessmen, and executives in the services.

### Religion

Religion is equally important variable to determine the voting behaviour of the electorate. It plays an important role in the elections of India. It is believed that the voters are more influenced by religion than many other variables. It is quite well known that political parties keep religious considerations in view while selecting candidates.

**Table. No. 7     Distribution of Respondents Religion wise**

Sr. No.	Religion	Total No. of Respondent	%age
1.	Sikhs	156	74.29
2.	Hindu	36	17.14
3.	Muslims	18	8.57

The table reveals that a vast majority of respondents 156(74.29%) were Sikhs, followed by 36 (17.14%) Hindu and 18 (8.57%) Muslims.

In reply to a question as to which party they or their family members had voted 102 (48.55) respondents mentioned APP 78 (37.18%) Akali Dal and 30 (14.27%) voted for Congress (I). Amongst the respondents only 4 (1.90%) were members of Akali Dal (B) while 206 (98.10%) did not belong to any political party.

When asked upto what extent had they been interested in the elections, the replies made by them were shown in Table No. 8.

**Table No. 8 Distribution of Respondents Lever of Interest in 2014 Election wise**

Sr. No.	Lever of Interest in 2014 Election	Total No. of Respondent	%age
1.	Great Deal	15	5.71
2.	To Some Extent	58	27.62
3.	Not at all	140	66.67
	<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>100</b>

It is evident from the above table that only 12 (5.71%) respondents were actively participating in the election campaigns while 140 (66.67%) were passive and 58 (27.62%) were at the periphery.

Amongst those 40 (19.04%) respondents did attend meetings organized by the political parties while 170 (80.96%) did not attend any meeting.

It was an interesting feature that when the respondents were asked to tell the names, party and symbol of the candidates who had contested the election this time; all the 210 (100.00) respondents mentioned the full details of Akali Dal(A) -BJP candidates, APP and the Congress (I) candidate. 11 (10.47%) could mention BSP; 17 (16.15%), Lok Dal (A). About other candidates no details were available with them. This shows that the contest was keen between those two candidates and people did not bother much about the losing and non-serious candidates.

What were the medias of getting election information? To this question, replies had been shown in table No. 9.

**Table No. 9: Mode of Companioning by the candidates**

Nature of Response	Total No. of Respondent	%age
Convassing by Party Workers/Candidates	62	58.9
Hand Bills	26	24.75
Election Meetings	20	19.04
Procession	10	9.52
Identity Slips	99	94.25

It is evident from the above table that majority of the respondents were contacted by the party workers who either distributed handbills, identity slips or made a personal request. Thus door-to-door canvassing was more popular.

Only ten respondents had been the members of municipality, while 200 had never contested for the membership of a local body even.

A question was asked to the respondents as to know which were the principal issue raised in the 2014 Lok Sabha Election. The nature of response of the respondents is given Table No. 10.

**Table No.10:-**

Issue	Total No. of Respondent	%age
Incumbency of Akali Dal, BJP Govt.	60	28.57
Corruption	80	38.10
Drugs	40	19.10
Rising prices of construction materials	30	14.28
<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>100</b>

When a question was asked to know whether an alliance formed by several parties could provide a stable government or not, 134 (63.40%) responded in affirmative. 60 (28.99%) respondents felt that it would lead to instability and 16 (7.61%) did not make any observation.

**Conclusion:-** In the end we can say that different factors played a different role in different strata of the society in determining the voting behaviour, in developed countries, factors are different but in developing and under developed countries factors are different nature. Which determine the voting behaviour of voters. In this study stress is given on the socio-economic factors which influenced the voting behaviour of the voters of Punjab. Sometime some issues related with people also determine the behaviour of voters.

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