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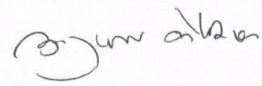
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## Political and Social Awareness of *Kumhar* (Potter) Women: A Case Study of Banasthali Village in Rajasthan

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### Abstract

Hindu society is divided into four *varnas* which are again divided in many castes and sub castes. The occupation and status of a person in Hindu society and religion was traditionally determined by a person's caste. Traditionally in Hindu society political power rested with the *ksatriya* or warrior class who were to be the kings or rulers or administrators or soldiers and *brahmin* priests who were to act as guide and ministers of the king. *Vaisha* or rich business people also had some share in governance but the lowest *varna* were denied participation. Even in the three *varnas* only elites were to enjoy political power. Common men and women were far away from any type of political participation. It was during national movement that common men and women started participating in political activities under the leadership of Gandhi and Congress or Ambedkar. After independence the constitution of India ensured adult franchise to all its citizens and affirmative action in form of reservation of seats in central and state legislatures to those belonging to traditionally lower castes i.e. schedule castes and scheduled tribes. This was to ensure that they are represented in the legislatures. As a result many men and women from these categories rose to the highest positions in the political system but the common masses remained far behind especially women because Indian society is patriarchal and women suffer additional disability of being lower in hierarchy than men. Present study is an attempt to understand the political and social awareness of *kumhar* (potter) women of a simple village in the state of Rajasthan in India.

**Keywords:** India; Rajasthan; Political Participation; Women; *Kumhar*; Potter.

### Introduction

Rajasthan's society is traditional, caste ridden and patriarchal society where castes are organized in hierarchy and the castes lower in hierarchy suffered many disadvantages traditionally. Although the constitution of independent India provides for affirmative action by which the castes lower in hierarchy get reservation in government educational institutions and jobs and this has improved lives of many men and women. The Constitution of free India also gave all citizens of India equal rights to participate in politics such as right to vote, right to form political parties and right to get elected etc and

it gave citizens belonging to scheduled caste and scheduled tribes reservation in central and state legislatures.

Many men and women belonging to these categories have risen to the position of President of India, ministers in central and state cabinet, chief ministers, bureaucrats, academicians, doctors, engineers etc. However many still lead a disadvantageous life in various villages in India. They are even more marginalized if they happen to be women. The modern age is the age of democracy and successful functioning of democracy presupposes active participation of both men and women in the political process.