

## **Why Musahars Vote?**

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## Why Musahars Vote?

In democracies elections are no less than national celebration. Election campaigns are extraordinary and full of symbols portraying diverse popular imageries. If one looks at the recently ended election for the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha this celebration was even louder and popular. The popular imageries were nationalistic in flavor that drove masses from all age, caste and region. At 66.4 percent, voter turnout was highest that India has ever seen in a national election. The election to India's 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha was looked upon as an election for change. The most popular imagery that the campaign projected was of good governance and development. What does this mean for communities that lie on the margins of body politics? Are their terms of engagement with this national celebration similar to others who enjoy electoral leverage?

In this paper I attempt to look at the margins through a chosen community (Musahars) using its own lens to analyse what election is and how it links up with the day today life of the community. The study involved informal conversation, formal and partially structured interviews with the adult community members. The narratives used in the paper have been gathered ten days prior to the actual polling date of the area, when the election campaign was at its peak. The idea was to capture perception as and when they are built and look through the process by which they are mobilized to generate support for parties. Field site observation of life as it unfolded in the immediate pre-election period remained central for gathering information and assessing behavior. In a tour of seven days a total of five villages/hamlets were covered<sup>(1)</sup>. Five FGDs with 8-15 participants in each were conducted. Apart from the FGDs detailed interviews with 11 persons selected as key respondents from the hamlets were done. Party offices of BJP and BSP were also visited to collect campaign material and capture the mood of party workers. Some party workers of BSP were interviewed in the field where they were campaigning for the party.

Parts of the dalit underbelly in the state Musahars come fourth after *chamar's Pasi & Dhobi* in terms of numbers in the Maharajganj district of Uttar Pradesh. Like their Bihar counterparts carries the burden of stigmatized identity of being 'rat eater' that obstructs their social and cultural assimilation into the village mainstream. According to 2001 census, the total population of Musahars in Uttar Pradesh was 206, 594 comprising 0.6% of total S.C. population in the state. Their hamlets are generally located in a remote corner of a village, which is seldom connected with a pacca/kuccha road. The general perception about them in the village community is that "they are lazy", "they cannot save", "they enjoy their idleness" and "they lack the mannerism to handle wealth and liberty". A decade earlier maximum number of hunger deaths in Uttar Pradesh were reported from this community and this led to phases of intervention by the civil society groups in different areas of Eastern Uttar Pradesh. They are distributed in 74 major hamlets there having a population of nearly 10000. The number may not matter as much to the candidates, as it matters for their collective identity, which they have built overtime.

Following Musahars in the last 10 years I have seen them challenging their marginalization through various means. The biggest catalyst for change has been exposure to the rights discourse brought in by the civil society groups working with them (Singh, 2013) and then the migration to other states for work. One member from each household migrates to earn their living. Devoid of homestead and agricultural land no work for a day means no food for the family (Singh, 2013). The period of civil society intervention coincided with BSP's regime in the state. They managed to get some land pattas and intermittent access to few government schemes like PDS and MNREGA. This made them support BSP and they started accompanying *chamars* in the rallies of Bahenji to see the world outside.

### **The Maharajganj Loksabha Constituency**

As the election campaign for 16<sup>th</sup> Loksabha was finishing off, its noise was getting harsher. Maharajganj district was scheduled to go for voting on the 16<sup>th</sup>

May 2014, in the last phase of the 2014 Parliamentary election. Twenty Three candidates including nine independent candidates were in the battleground. Reports of earlier phases of voting spread over a period of almost a month had already indicated some major changes in the voting pattern and some cleavages in the caste blocs especially the dalit caste bloc. Parties were doing and overdoing their images to mobilize support from new blocs of voters, and had started covertly addressing primordial identities more than developmental issues at the ground level door to door contacts. The outward appearance of development, which to some extent also resonated in almost all major rallies of the party leaders, was conspicuously absent in the village level campaigning by the party cadres. The charismatic appeal of national leaders, was heavily relied upon to create wave. All major contenders were known faces and had been in power once or twice but their names hardly enthused the voters whom we surveyed. They instead used party symbols or the name of national leader to distinguish between parties. The temporary party offices of all parties at Nichloul were almost deserted with at the most four to five people present. The party vehicles were canvassing in villages with recorded songs in local language to attract public attention.

In some places we also saw cyclist draped in the party flag touring hamlets. The use of graffiti, pamphlets and other such material seemed limited in the rural area. We did come to know of huge army of local cadres recruited at the time of election, to oversee booth management by parties like BSP and this time BJP as well. In fact it is looked upon as a good earning opportunity by the youths, who sincerely devote their time and energy. Some of them have ideological commitment and driven by a cause, but many join the foray to earn an extra penny.

In this cacophony of campaign, *Musahars* of Maharajganj district in Uttar Pradesh were also preparing themselves to be heard both for recognition of their identities and material basic needs.

The *Musahars* came to light when in the 2007 state assembly elections, the residents of two gram panchayats of Shikarpur and Sohagibarwa, not being heard for their basic needs, and where they constitute a majority, refused to cast their

vote. The Election Commission was mobilizing them through special awareness campaigns in this election. The activeness of election commission was not matched by similar sensitization on part of parties. Ten days prior to polling no one had visited Musahar tola. They were silently observing the *tamasha* (drama) and were waiting for their turn to be heard. They had resolved to put their demand to every candidate or its representative that may come to distribute *parchas* (pamphlets). They knew that they will need to wait as such visits are made at the last moment, a day or two before the campaigning stops. Their demands were simple- a small unit of homestead land and some secure means of livelihood. Before that fortunate day they could only see the jeeps passing by, a few throwing some flags for the trailing children to collect. Still, the community votes and would vote in all coming elections.

### **Why Vote?**

Scholars on Indian democracy have observed that the poor turn out to vote in large numbers (Yadav 1996, 1999; Alam 2004; Kumar 2009) as they value democracy much more than the elites who have multiple ways of fulfilling their needs and accessing state (Alam 2004, Krishna 2008). In light of this trend one needs to understand what motivates poor to vote. In our case this poor has an added disadvantage of being numerically small which comes in their way of being the beneficiary of vote bank politics. The instrumentalist view of voting as a skillful transactional behavior, an instrument that can lead to tangible benefits (Chandra 2004) fails to explain the behavior of the most marginalized.

I have seen in my fieldwork in the last ten years that the community response to voting, has shifted from a compulsory exercise for maintaining their name in the *sarkarikagaz* (government record) to a realization that this may bring about some change for them.

As we entered the Katan Tola we could see the writing on the wall - "*Hum bhi iss samaj ke aanghai*" (We are also part of the same society). There was a community center built by the panchayat in front of the hamlet. Soon women, children and some old people gathered here to see who has come to visit them.

They took us as party representatives who had come there for an appeal to vote. When they found that we were there only for a general discussion on election they started venting their anger on how they are constantly ignored by all parties when it comes to campaigning. Their initial response to why they vote was that do not wish to waste a *mat* by not participating and even if it would not bring any return to them it might benefit someone. But as we proceeded further in our conversation we realized that the group of women was very vocal and aware. They knew the weight of the vote and the relevance of voting. They nurtured great expectation in return also realized that it's their power, which they wish to exercise freely. Jiriya Devi shared,

*“Its by casting our vote that we become entitled to fight for our rights, its a medium that legitimizes our claim on the government...when we form, we can ask, when we ask we can hope to get...”*

Its no simple give and take, it's a strange hope against all odd. They have little to lose and they cannot be worse off than what they are, so they wish to breath in fresh air when it comes to choosing their representative. Their hand to mouth existence gives them a strange sense of liberty. They think that they have little to lose but much to gain.

For some voting in their village would push their name up in the system. On the question of why do they vote they were shocked with our ignorance of its importance Kamali (Sakardinhi) said,

*“Can anyone afford not to vote?...if you do not vote then your name would be struck down from the government's list....then can you put it back no.....its almost impossible...”*

When we probed further on why it is important to be no the list in the first place she continued further,

*“that's because without that you cannot claim your rights....we vote to make a government ...people whom we elect join the government....its by virtue of voting that we become entitled to ask for our rights...”*

The use of the language of rights by the non-poor<sup>(ii)</sup> has been attributed to their particular relationship with the state -as moments when they feel represented



by agents of the state, when politicians and bureaucrats seek and have sympathetic relationship with them (Ahuja and Chibber, 2012). But this short-lived relationship is not merely an opportunity to bargain for tangible benefits but as moments to reverse the social equation of giver and taker. It is a *daan* (donation), whereby returns do not matter- '*They come here with their hands folded and plead for vote, we give our votes just as one gives some food to a beggar who stands at your door*', says Chandravati resident of *Musahar* hamlet of Naksa-Baksa. For yet some others it's part of the goodwill gesture to contribute without expecting a return Barji said, "*Matdaan* (vote) is a *daan* and we give generously".

Another version of voting came from Fuldevi (resident of katan hamlet), a young articulate member of the *musahar* manch, who still thinks that missing the ballot would mean being declared dead for the state. She explained,

*"If your name is there and you do not vote then not only your name gets deleted but you are also declared dead....dead on paper...dead for the government....voting ensures that you are recognized as the members of the village community....it gives you a legal face."*

She confirmed that its not her imagination and that it has happened many times. Since adults from almost every family migrate out for work many times they are not able to come back at the time of elections. The community ensures that at least those who are present vote in full number so that their space in the system is not reduced. Ramsubhan (Naksabaksa hamlet) said,

*'If someone is sick he/she would be taken on a rickshaw, if there is flooding we will swim to the booth, if there is marriage function in the hamlet we would go in early hours, but we would cast our vote....'*

Such response of compulsory voting was common across the entire visited hamlet. The act of voting itself is seen to encode principles of equality, fairness, efficiency, rights and duties, all of which are valued ideals (Banerjee, 2014: 169). In case of *musahars* we see that there is conscious choice for these ideals in their journey for recognition. Malhari (Aurahwa hamlet) was clear and said,

*"we will vote...unless u nurture a strong tree how would creepers climb"*

### Election Issues for Musahars

Community was of the opinion that in spite of casting their ballot for long their condition has not changed because they have not been making a conscious choice. Let's now look at the nature of this emerging consciousness, which is captured best in the issues that drive them to vote.

In terms of the issues all elections were same for them. What differed from election to election was the power and autonomy of the representative to bring about change on the ground. So MP is more powerful than the MLA and the Pradhan comes last, was their understanding of the democracy. They also knew that though MP is more powerful but in terms of access he is the farthest and so the election for parliament was not about the state of their affairs. This is not to say that an MP could not solve their problems but they knew that the channel of communication was nearly absent. Ramchandra (Gerarharuwa hamlet) admitted,

*“many of us had not seen block office few years ago, its only recently that we have started going to the tehsil office with our charter of demands...elections are important but how to relate with them, who is there to hear us...still we vote because that is mandatory...”*

The most important issue for them these days was the non-payment of MNREGA wages for 17 people from their hamlet. A new pucca road was constructed to connect the hamlet with the main village, in which many labourers from their own hamlet were employed but the payments for many were pending for last six months. Likewise the primary school near their hamlet had just one teacher with whom they were not satisfied. They had been demanding for more teachers in the school for almost a year now. The youths from the hamlet migrate to other states in search for work and they seemed to have brought in the concern for education in the community but they are unable to ensure that their kids get proper education in the school and this pains them much. Chandrajyoti (Gerarharuwa hamlet) admitted,

*“we want our kids to be educated so that they can move ahead with honour but they are beaten in school...my child stopped going to school as he is scared....he gets little space there...the teacher refuses to meet us they say your child is not clean, you are not clean...what is going to change and how...our vote have no weight but has to be casted in order to secure a place to live...”*

In Gerarharuwa the choice for the MLA position their choice has always been the local landlord on whose land they are settled, irrespective of his party affiliation. Presently he is with the Samajwadi Party and they have no grudge in supporting the party through him. They have little choice as he is the man on whom they are dependent for their existence and they cannot possibly afford to displease him. He has been with the BSP before and then the community went with the BSP.

It is to be noted that in spite of largest concentration of the community in Gerarharuwa hamlet the musahars do not constitute a majority in the gram panchayat here. This goes a long way in determining what possibilities people believe in. Here musahars are not in a position to bring about village level swing and other caste of dalits like chamars, dharikar, kewat, dhobi, kori outnumber them. So they feel the linkage with the local landlords the safest bet.

In other hamlets like Aurahwa, Sakardinhi and Katan that fall in the panchayat where musahar constitute a majority the tone of conversation with respect to possibilities was very different. There people talked about creating space for themselves through participation in election. The issues here too were local in nature but they had larger context of respect and recognition. Vrinda (katan hamlet) said,

*“we want good life for our children so that they can move forward at the same pace as the rest of the world...we will elect those whom we can approach at the time of crisis...”*

**Jatahi (KatanTola) says,**

*“ People hardly care for us, we have to remind them that we exist...some money, a piece of cloth or a mouthful of liquor will not last forever...these are things that we want, our needs are limited but they are not going to be the providers for all times...they would come once in 5 yrs.... will that suffice? ...cloth would wear out...for how long the money last in the market? On that do you think we will give them the right to write our destiny....If we get lured on these we would be finished .... we want roads, schools, house, land, work and fair wages.”*

In Ledi and Sakardinhi the community shared that as an MP/MLA they want someone whom they can approach at the time of crisis, when their women

are molested and raped, when they are dying of hunger, when they are tortured by the police and implicated in false cases.

There is an emerging demand from the vocal and aware section called *Musahar Manch*<sup>(iii)</sup>, that *Musahars* should be included in the Scheduled Tribe category by the state and the central government. Their logic is simple that if the government can announce its intention (referring to state government of U.P.) to include 16 more communities in the Scheduled Caste category, why they similarly cannot be shifted from this to that category, to ensure better access to quotas. They have made up their mind to support a party that promises to deliver on this. They have made connections with *Musahar* community leaders of other districts too so that they can make an effective consensus for whom to support in this election. They planned to begin their aggressive campaign in the community after they decide which party to support. The parties have already approached this young group of community workers for mobilizing community support. The *Manch* (Forum) enjoys a lot of respect and support in the community and at many hamlets people confessed that they would go by the advice of the *Manch*.

### **What are the Choices?**

The decision on whom to vote is a well-calculated move. A day before the elections they would sit together in the hamlet and deliberate on various options. They would consider the opinion of the their own district level *Manch* (Forum).

They have heard some people saying in the village that *kamalis* making government at Delhi this time, but they do not know the party representative from their district. Some have heard that a person from Gujarat has come this time for *kamal*. They are familiar with Gujarat as many of their children have gone there for work. But on being asked what image of development they carry, they could only think of the bad treatment they receive when migrants from their community are not able to work due to illness. They also seemed to be distressed by the bad working conditions for laborers like them at the work site and shared, '*there is money, but that is often earned at the cost of our pride, our children tolerate a lot, they have a party of banias (traders)*', says Basmati.

Ramchandra an active member of the musaharmanch at Grerharuatola admitted that internal solidarity is an issue with the community. According to him this is displayed most at the time of panchayat election when the community often fails to build a consensus for a single Musahar candidate. This results in more than one candidate contesting for single post from the community. The inevitable splitting of votes ensures defeat for all. As compared to the panchayat election, the consensus is easier to be built for an MLA and MP elections.

In Grerharua people admitted that the choice was between the *Kamal, Panja* and *Haanthi*. They have respect for *Haanthi* but some felt that *Haanthi* won't be able to make a government at Delhi. They have heard of *Kamal* and its wave in this election. They visited the main *bazaar* and have heard some people discussing on the prospects of *Kamal* in the ongoing election. Not all seemed to be aware of these developments and those who were updated, had little inclination to discuss it in the community. The decision to vote was non-negotiable but the decision on whom would be taken only a day or two before the polling date and the voice of the manch would count the most in that crucial deliberation. They were not expecting any door to door campaigning for their hamlet but they knew that some *parchas* would be thrown at their doorsteps, some party men might meet few members of their community to assess their mood. The logic of the secret ballot was clear in their mind and they seemed to be cautious in revealing their choice. But there were whisper's that their own landlord was in support of the *Kamal*.

No matter whom will they vote but one thing is sure that each and every member whose name is there in the voting list would cast their vote.

A strong wave of support for BSP was more than evident in three out the five visited hamlets. The Musaharsof Sakardinhi, Ledi and Naksa-Baksahave been the supporters of BSP for long and also carry a very positive image of its functioning Dulari shared,

*“things are different when behenji is there....we are entertained in government offices and thanas....the cases of atrocities against our women are also less...”*

She was disappointed that this time around no one from the BSP has visited them. Infact in the last couple of years their connection with the party men has weakened considerably. Malhari an old lady from the community seemed very angry with the campaigning team of the BSP. She is a staunch supporter of BSP and has actively participated in many rallies of BSP. She shared,

*“people used to wonder who we are. ...those days were beyond imagination...I have heard that once musahars decided to participate in a marriage function and accompanied other villagers in the procession to the neighbouring village...the bride side heard that there are few musahars with the guests and they questioned who they are and what do they eat? They thought that we eat grass and leaves and we are some animals....”*

The narration underlines a sense of exclusion and pain of non-recognition. She continues,

*“Its only when Behenji came that we were herded with other communities to be part of the huge gatherings in the district and the state.....we joined them as it was for the first time that we were willingly called to be part of some gathering....we travelled, we sang, we cheered and heard....it was an eye opener.. we realized what we have been missing...”*

She has been instrumental in mobilizing other men and women from the community to be part of the rallies. She thinks that such participation is educative and helps in bringing forth the desire to struggle for recognition and respect. The level of political awareness also seemed to be higher in this hamlet as compared to the other hamlets. Many people here could distinguish between local, regional and national election. People also had their opinion on the national parties. They felt that Congress has lost its sheen as they lost touch with the issues of village community. Their feeling for BJP was not yet very concrete. They had heard that someone from Gujarat had come this time but their own knowledge of Gujarat was very limited. Their men do travel there in search of work but apart from the money that they bring back they have never spoken about the government. Their engagement remains limited to the contractor who takes them on job and they toil day night to save some money for home.

They have not yet made up their mind on whom they shall vote for. It was much easier earlier when the only party they knew was *Bahenji'shaanthi* (*Mayawati's Elephant*). All others for them were only *sarkar* (*lord*), a distant *sarkar* (*lord*). They still have much respect for the *haanthi* (*Elephant*) and some even swear to be with it no matter whether it wins or faces a defeat. But now they are also looking for a direct recognition within the party of *Bahujan*. Malhari attended *Bahenji's* public meeting at Maharajganj during this campaign and it pained her that she took names of all communities in her address except of *Musahars*. She called up the ex-MLA who has now joined BSP the next day to communicate that party needs more cadres and that she want to be part of the campaign. She wants Bahenji to know *Musahars*.

The response of the ex BSP MLA was quick and he claimed to have maintained a constant touch with the community. He has been part of BJP prior to his membership in BSP and seemed to have no rigid party loyalty. His conversation with the community gave an impression of a paternalistic relationship. Presence of outsiders (our team) seems to bother him. In spite of our best explanation he was convinced that we were on a secret mission of the election commission. Sharing his experience he said,

*“These people are gullible and have little sense.....they do not understand election....it makes no difference to them who wins or loses...nobody takes care of them...who will hear them....I was moved by their extreme poverty and started coming here so that I might help them in some way ... they live for the day ..... if today they get some money they will spend all in eating and drinking ... they do not care for education ... see their children all loitering ... they are just like that ...their development is not possible as they are not literate ... they are not even interested to learn these skills...”*

He was echoing the same age-old prejudice that musahars are careless, they have little concern for future and that their own attitudes are responsible for their poverty in some way. But he was benevolent enough to notice their inability to move on their own so he has been providing support. On our insistence he started his conversation with the community and his opening sentence was,

*“Yes so who was that lady ....she was shouting on the phone like a lioness over phone....i was amazed to hear such a strong voice and thought that I must see who is she....so tell me what you want...”*

The assertion of Malhari was unexpected for the leader. He guessed something must have been simmering in the community, which he must attend to save the fortunes of the party. He went on to discuss who has been looking after the area in his party. He agreed to include more cadets from the community for election campaign not only for this area but for other areas as well where musahar population is substantial. After discussing these plans he left giving a hope for an inclusive campaigning. The community also seems to be satisfied with the visit, as he had come on their call. It gave them a sense of empowerment; it made Malhari a leader in her own way. But the disconnect between the BSP leader and the community's knowledge/understanding of election was more than evident. While parties make a pretense of involving them they follow the suit in the hope to carve out a space for themselves. It's a unique give and take where each is using the other as an instrument and both are hopeful to get what they want.

On the question of party preference they were hesitant to share and Malti (Sarkardinhi hamlet) said,

*“we will see in which direction the breeze is flowing ...we will decide accordingly...its not difficult to feel the breeze and guess its direction. A day before voting when discussions would be at the peak a general sense can be easily made....nobody wants to waste their vote so we would go by the general opinion of the village.....”*

Kamali shared an interesting way of knowing which way things are moving on the day of voting itself,

*“ If one looks at the button of the Voting Machine in front of all symbols one can make out which button is being pressed again and again and we share this information with others after coming out of the booth....if there is a wave then a particular button would be loose and go down a little...”*

As we moved on in the discussion and started talking about each party their opinions started differing. While Kamli felt that all parties have been same in terms of output for them and their life does not change which party forms the



government, Fuladevi immediately checked her. Fuladevi reminded her of how things had changed when Behenji was in power, how police changed its behavior and they too were looked upon with respect in thanas. Fuladevi asserted,

*“its only haanathi that can revive our fortunes....its no hollow hope ..this has happened...every time Behenji came to power we managed to have more say in panchayats, in tensil and in thanas...what more proof is required...everything started moving smoothly ... money started reaching us through scheme...whether its Indra Awas or ration cards we managed to get our shares.....i swear to be with haanathi no matter what may come...Behenji wins or not I will not give in to the waves...”*

Fuladevi and others agreed that they are looked upon as BSP supporters so no matter whom they vote for in this election, they would still be hushed away by others as BSP supporters. Malti said,

*“why to leave our own home when people won't trust us....we will be a loser even if we change sides...who has flourished by leaving their own home, their own roots....”*

They are aware that the main fight in their district is between *haanathi* (Elephant) and *kamal* (Lotus). Their support to BSP has been unequivocal so far Kamali said,

*“If you put a flower in a plate filled with water no matter how strong the wind, flower may move a little, but still would remain in the plate, even if you put the plate in river it would swim with the plate”*

When we asked her who is the flower and who is the plate and wind means what then she said,

*“We can be flower and a party can be the plate...once we chose to be in a plate no wind can pull us out we would swim and sink with it....the plate can only follow the current....winds do not change the current....”*

A large part of the community seems to be tied with BSP but they are aware that elections are about choice, that to choose is their prerogative, and further that it's best to vote in a block. Efforts would be made at all level to make an informed choice and the final decision would be postponed until the last date.

The manch had already made up its mind to run a campaign two days prior to the voting to mobilize collective support for the chosen party. In all previous

election they have been supporting BSP without an overt campaigning but they were weighing the pros and cons this time keeping its options open.

Post election results when we contacted the manch they confirmed that they had given the call in favour of BJP and the candidate had promised that if he wins he would take their demand forward. They claim to have already received an invitation for a meeting with senior party members at Delhi.

It is difficult to believe that the entire community would have conceded to the call of manch but a substantial section may have gone with them, knowing that this was the national election where BSP was not going to form the government.

### **Conclusion**

The ethos of democratic politics finds vibration at the margins of human society. The enthusiastic participation of *Musahar* community in the electoral politics is indicative of strong linkage between election and the everyday life of the community. Voting is not just another routine exercise for them but rather a well thought out action to persuade ends that are specific but have larger connotation of identity, recognition and respect. This identity is of not just being dalit (the exploited) or the poorest among the poor; but of being a *musahar*, being a human, a citizen. In this journey of finding political space they have aligned with the larger dalit constituency but having internalized the democratic ethos they are now ready to consider options. The logic of the secret ballot is clear to them and they guard this privilege to the last moment lest they are declared supporters of one or the other block. The past commitment for the party of *bahujan* still has a strong appeal but this appeal cannot be taken for granted. The ideological connect between the party and the community needs to translate into practical action especially when the party is not in power. The rhetoric of development, governance, secularism or even dalit identity fails to appeal their sensibility and their choices are weighed against the issues that are essentially local in all elections. While the community is seeking recognition the parties are not bothered to reach out to them due to their small numbers. No campaigning at their doorsteps

or an uncertain visit on the last day testifies the reluctance of parties to acknowledge their strength. They are presumed to be an adjunct community that would align with one or the other voting bloc or even if don't equations would remain the same. In spite of such reluctance the community hopes, it hopes the dream to nurture a strong tree on which they like creepers could climb. They wait on the campaigning days for visits by the party cadres; they prepare themselves for the Election Day and postpone all other work until they cast their vote on the final day.

### Notes

(i) Sakardinhi (Kanveswapanchayat); Ledi (Ramchandrahpanchayat); Aurahwa (Kanveswapanchayat) Naksabaksa (Naksa-Baksapanchayat); Gerarharuwa (Khesraripanchayat); Katan (Kanveswapanchayat) hamlets of Nichlaul Tehsil were visited. In order to make proper sense of what was being spoken researcher visited those hamlets with which she was familiar. In other words selection of hamlets was dependent on the previous information that has been gathered in the last 10 years during the course of long interaction with the community. For example Ledi hamlet which is situated near to the Nichlaul town had a history of strong agitation of musahar women to secure entitlements. Another criterion for the selection of hamlets was population concentration. For example Gerarharuwa was the largest hamlet of the musahar community in the area with 110 households. Similarly Aurahwa has 57 households and Sakardinhi 56 households. Naksabaksa also constitute a special case as here *musahar* and *chamars* live in adjacent hamlets and there is frequent social exchange between the communities.

(ii) In case of Musahars the use of the language of rights may partially be attributed to their participation in the rallies and sabhas of BSP with other dalit community and partially to the intervention by civil society groups. The significant by product of such intervention has been their direct entry into the panchayat election at all the three tiers (village, block and district). After initial debacles such participation has resulted in few musahars getting elected as ward members, pradhan and member of BDC in select gram panchayats and blocks where they command majority.

(iii) A variant of the CBO formed at the time of Action Aid intervention. Initially each hamlet used to elect two representatives periodically for the manch constituting a body of 156 members and then these people used to elect an executive of 12 members to perform various function. After the exit of the action aid this executive registered itself as an NGO and currently this NGO is supported primarily by Acton aid and other smaller donars to operate in the community. Though the operational area of the NGO (now called Musahar Seva Sansthan) is much restricted now (reduced from earlier 78 hamlets to 28) informally the manch reaches out to all the 78 hamlets of the community in the district.

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