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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## WHERE THE POWER RESIDES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GUJARAT AND HIMACHAL PRADESH STATE ELECTIONS 2017

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### Abstract

Gujarat and Himanchal these are the two states where elections held for the State Assembly simultaneously in 2017. Both the states have different socio-economic set ups besides that in their political institutions and processes there are some common characteristics. Bi-party system, gender inequality in political arena, accommodative trend of the diverse interest within the two parties and strong party leadership are prominent features of the state politics in both the states. Paper is an attempt to analyse the trends of state politics by comparing the socio economics ecologies and their impact on the state politics in Gujarat and Himachal. Entire study is based on the secondary data and personal observations of the researchers as primary data.

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### Introduction:-

Election is a process which reflects the society's ethos, nature of polity as well as the economic aspirations. In the Indian context election process being mirror of the society reflects the heterogeneous nature of the Indian society. India is a vast country having multiple reasons for the diverse political developments in the country. Electoral politics of the state's is one of the good examples of that. Since 1967 with the changing contours of the politics, states located themselves in the prior seat in the national politics. States electoral dimensions need thorough understanding; to peep insight the national politics. Present paper deals with the electoral issues during assembly elections in the two states of the country: Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat in 2017. In both the states assembly elections held in November & December 2017. Both the states had immense importance for the two main political parties of the country: Congress and BJP. Himachal was among the few states where Congress was in power after 2014. Sh. Virbhadr Singh ex-Chief Minister of the state is seasoned leader of the party. He is considered as the most popular face of the Congress in the state. Congress was confident to retain power in the state under his leadership. Gujarat was important for the BJP as it is the state of the present Prime Minister Narendra Modi and in 2014 Parliamentary elections 'Gujarat development model' the election plank of the party.

Basic argument of the study is that both the states have similar political developments; having bi-party system. Caste and class factors have dominant position in the system but these traditional interests accommodated within the bi-party system. Development factor is deciding factor of the state politics. Although the socio-economic profile of both the states differ from each other. Atul Kohli (1991) made the point clear regarding Indian states. He took the example of Bihar and Gujarat 'although unique conditions are operative in each state, the common issues appeared to be political', (Kohli 1991: 385). Gujarati people known for their entrepreneurship. Since ages Gujarat is exposed to the outside world: Arabian, African impact on their living is evidence of that. Muslim community constitutes around 13 per cent of the total population of the state. Hindus and Muslims on the basis of common professional

activities they have common name usages (these are based on professions like Modi, Patel). Urban population of the state is 42.26 per cent of the total population. Human Development Index (HDI) of the state and economic development reveals in the state still traditional practices like little interest in the women education is there. Traditionalism has deep roots in the Gujarat society besides economic development. The other proposed area for this study is Himachal Pradesh. It's a small north-western state of the country. Himachal is a hilly state, people are innocent and easy going. Economy is agro based. 90 per cent population of the state is rural population. Mainly Hindu religion is the dominant religion. Communal harmony is prefect. Human Development Index indicates the state is performing better as compare to the national parameters in the field of sex-ratio, child mortality and literacy rate. Caste and class are the dominant factors in the state. Feudal practices of land lordism, worshipping old royal families, loyalty to the royal families at the time of election also determine the power structure in the state. Electoral process has been selected to understand the uniform political developments in both the states besides variations in the socio-economic system.

### **Electoral Politics in Gujarat and Himachal:**

Polls in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh were held simultaneously and had similarities as far as competitive politics. Electorate similarity in both the states that went to polls after the implementation of the Demonetisation and Goods and Services Tax (GST) was the bipolar nature of the electoral contest between the two largest national parties, the BJP and the Congress with the former in power in Gujarat and the latter in Himachal Pradesh fighting anti-incumbency sentiments in both the states. Absence of the third political front or force in both the states made it a direct battle within the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Congress.

In both the states in the assembly election BJP was confident to win. In electoral history of HP, since 1985 out of the two main parties no one has ever been able to repeat in the state assembly elections. BJP was sure about its turn this time. In Gujarat besides twenty two years in power in the state, BJP calculated its victory due to the Modi factor and Congress's organisational weaknesses. The BJP looks for the facile victories in both Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh, according to a string of exit polls conducted by various media groups. Almost all exit polls predicted more than 100 seats for the BJP in Gujarat where the party has been ensured in power for close to two decades now. In Himachal Pradesh, where the electorate has chosen the Congress and BJP alternately in the assembly polls, the exit polls projected a clear majority for the saffron party unseating the Congress, (The Tribune, December 14, 2017). Congress leadership in Himachal claimed its victory in the elections on the basis of developmental works in the state in the last five years. In Gujarat Congress made every effort to win the elections by manipulating the OBC and Dalit young leaders and propagating anti Modi moves.

Gujarat results appear to be an unexpected wrinkle, one that is not impossible for the BJP to smooth out given its well-oiled election machine. For even though the BJP's boast of winning two-third majority in the 182 member Gujarat assembly a state it has ruled continuously for the last two decades, fell well short at 99, just seven seats more than a simple majority and less than the 16 number it had in the outgoing assembly, it has slightly increased its vote share from 47.9 per cent to 49.1 per cent. Its support base in the state remains solid and neither anti-incumbency nor a rejuvenated Congress party has been able to effectively erode that, (EPW, December 23, 2017: 7). Narendra Modi's home state was the centrepiece of the BJP's campaign in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, where it was sold to the rest of India as the model for the development. Gujarat was the launchpad for the BJP's national-level ambitions. It now seems to have held out a ray of hope for the Congress which desperately looking to revive its political fortunes. Not having won in the state since 1985, the Congress put up its best showing in 32 years, (The Hindu, December 19, 2017). Congress in this election combined communal, caste and national issues to convince the Gujarati masses to vote them in the assembly elections. On the communal front they tried to appease the Muslim voters with its secular credential and minority favouring policy programmes. It made every effort to divide the Hindu Gujarati's on the caste lines. By taking in the confidence three young leaders of Patel's, OBCs and Dalits in the reservation issues Rahul Gandhi made hard efforts to gain the vote share of these communities. Election results of Gujarat indicates that urban Gujarat was convinced by the Modi's economic reforms. Out of the total 55 urban seats, BJP claimed 44 and the Congress 11 seats. Out of the total 127 seats in rural Gujarat and semi-urban areas of the state, the Congress claimed 68 seats and the BJP 55. Region-wise, the 54 seats in Kutch-Saurashtra, the BJP won 23 seats and the Congress 30 with one seat going to the NCP and Out of the 35 seats in south Gujarat, the BJP won 25 seats and the Congress won 10 respectively. In North Gujarat, the BJP won 30 seats and the Congress 23 seats, while in central Gujarat, 21 seats went to the BJP and 17 to the Congress with others winning two, (The Tribune, December 19, 2017). It may be believed that neither demonetisation nor the GST regime has dented its support among traders and the middle class but the heart-stopper results in starting counting has given enough reasons for

BJP to rethink. Elections exposed a vast urban-rural divide and provided some lessons for the parties. Out of 127 rural seats, BJP suffered a loss of 14 seat as compare to the last assembly polls to bring its tally to 56, while the Congress gained 17 seats, giving it a total of 68 seats, (Purie, 2018: 5). It indicates farmer's displeasure and dissatisfactory position with the centre government and state government policy.

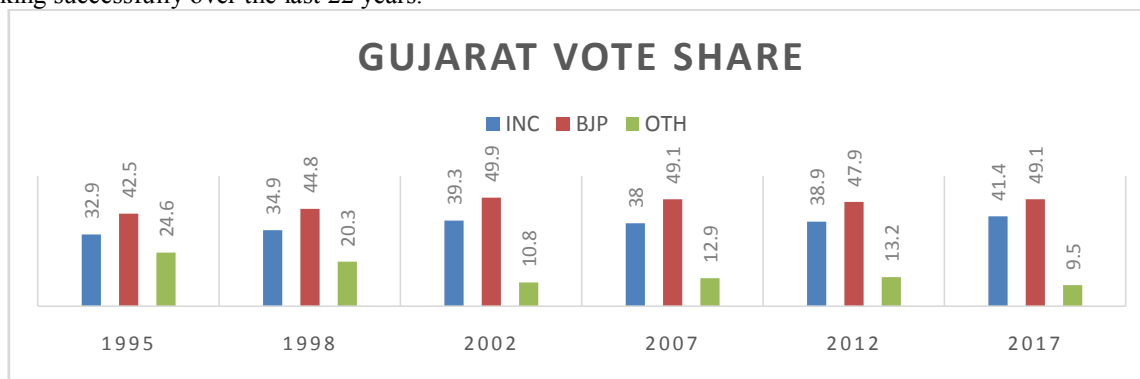
Caste wise distribution also indicates the young leaders (Hardik, Alpesh and Jignesh) were not able to detach their communities as a whole. It also indicates there was no radical change in the Gujarat electoral policies. Although BJP's vote share increased two percent among Muslim community as compare to the 2012.

BJP's return to the seat of governance in the hill state after a gap of five years was not a surprise because no party retain the reins of the power since 1985 second time. While six-time Congress chief Minister Virbhadra Singh led his party campaign, his political adversary former chief minister Prem Kumar Dhumal was the face of the BJP, (Rajalakshmi, 2018: 17). Keeping alive the state's record of changing governments at every election, Himachal Pradesh brought the BJP back to the power with a handsome margin of the seats. The Congress was reduced to just 21 seats in a house of 68 and most of its cabinet ministers also lost the election. On the other side BJP won 44 seats while two seats begged by the independents and one CPI (M) candidate also registered his victory.

BJP's main Focus in Gujarat was development while congress hit out the issues like GST, demonetisation and Caste configuration. Other side in the Hill state the main focus of BJPs campaign was corruption, while the Congress hit out at the opposition regarding the issues of the Goods and Service's Tax (GST) and demonetisation at the national level. In both the state's Congress mainly focused on Modi's policies. Local issues were less important in both the states. Election results of both the states indicate some common features: in both the state's voters have good understanding of the electoral politics. They vote keeping in mind the development issues along with the caste and class factor. In Gujarat Congress made every effort to encash anti-incumbency in the state and flows of GST and demonetisation. Election results indicate people are ready to wear the pinch of the changes. In Himachal assembly election results indicate people focus on the development issues their voting pattern indicates relation between the local and national politics. Modi factor, development agenda had profound impact on the state electoral politics. Virbhadra Singh known as the mass leader of the Congress failed to woo the voters in the state in general even in the areas like Shimla, Solan, which are considered to be his pockets, he failed to register his effective presence. In Himachal and Gujarat in both the state's voters believed in the politics of the development and cast their vote keeping in mind the development strategies. Hence caste and class factor combine with the development factor in the elections. Political parties chalk out their electoral strategies keeping in mind the caste and class factor. Voter take into consideration development, caste and class variables, but not caste and class independently.

#### Stable bi-party System:

Along with the saffron sisters of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, Gujarat has seen a two-party system working successfully over the last 22 years.

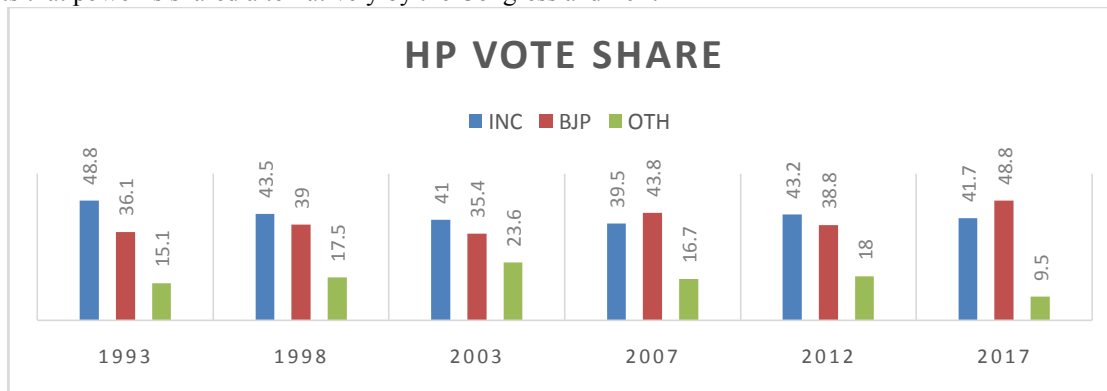


Source: Election Commission of India.

The state has not seen the rise of a third front and the number of candidates in the Gujarat assembly elections has also remained restrained since the emergence of the BJP in 1995 as the only alternative to the Congress. BJP and the Congress were the only parties that remained in the fray since 1995. This set the two party trend in Gujarat, (Business Line November 1, 2017). Clearly, there appears no room for a third political force in Gujarat, which has witnessed a two party race to power. Shankar Singh Vagehla formed his own party in Gujarat Rashtriya Janata Party

(1996-98), it performed miserably poor. State has 13 percent Muslim, 22 percent OBC, 7 percent SC and 14.75 percent are Adivasi voters. In the state, all the heterogeneous interests are accommodated within these two parties. Third party BSP failed to get 2 per cent vote share in the state in 2017 elections. This trend indicates people do not believe in the narrow interests. Stable gap between the two parties, vote share indicates both the parties have stable vote share. Floating vote share is less in this election, when the state government's performance after Modi was not excellent, there was little effect on the voting patterns.

On the other side in Himachal, The past trend in the state politics reveals that there is always an elements of anti-incumbency against the ruling government. It is only the matter of degree that varies from election to election. Once again it has been established that the state has a stable bi-party system. After the declaration of the result, it is clear that the public mandate reflects a balanced picture this time. Though the general political scenario in the state reflects that power is shared alternatively by the Congress and BJP.



Source: Election Commission of India.

This election was a straight contest between the two parties like the assembly elections 2012, which saw a formation like the Himachal Lokhit Party (HLP) as well as many independents in the fray. The HLP a breakaway faction of the BJP, eroded the BJP vote base and helped the Congress win a simple majority. Prior to the 2017 assembly elections the HLP declared its merger with the BJP and ensured that the anti-congress vote did not get divided; a significant proportion of it went to the BJP, (Frontline January 2, 2018: 17).

It is commonly argued that the BJP secures the maximum gains in states that witness bipolar contests, especially where it faces the Congress as its principal opponent. Since 1985 Himachal evolved as bi-party system. There is little scope for third alternate. In 1998 an off shoot of Congress, Himachal Vikas Congress (HVC) was formed, with its help Prof. Prem Kumar Dhumal formed the government in the states. Same happened in 2012 BJP's legendary leader Maheshwar Singh, formed Himachal Lokhit Party (HLP). Congress formed the government in the state with the help of its members. Otherwise in the state no party has been able to provide third alternative. In the state floating vote is stable. Except in 1993 and 2017 the floating vote was not more than 6 per cent. Swing in every election was stable. In the state total SC, ST and OBC population is fifty percent. No third alternate on the basis of traditional factors have been able to occupy space in the Himachal politics. Gujarat and Himachal has demographic variations and similarities also. Traditional institutions and roles are well knitted in both the societies. Developed bi-party system indicates the maturity of the societies. In both the societies people try to assimilate and articulate their interests within these two parties. System responds less to the traditionalism in the polity. Congress and the BJP both the national parties successfully satisfy the heterogeneous needs of the society. Strong caste stratification in the society; diverse interests of the upper castes and lower castes are accommodated within the two parties. Voting patterns, stable shift of the votes indicates stability and persistence of the bi-party system in the state. Gujarat for the twenty two years governed by the one party (BJP), voting graph shows the Congress in the state has constant vote share and enjoyed the status of the opposition. Cause of persistence of one ruling party may be charismatic leadership, development issues and the BJP's strategy to manage the plurality of the Gujarat society. Since 1991 'the gap performance between the Congress and BJP has considerably narrowed down. The Congress has improved its strength both in terms of vote and seat share... Gujarat BJP has been personified with Narendra Modi. It had 67 seats of the house of 182 members. The situation was reversed in 2009,' (Palishkar 2014: 101). Same trend is persisting till December 2017 (Assembly Elections).

**Caste, Class:**

Caste is being one of the important factors during the elections in India. All the political parties keep caste configurations in mind while deciding its political-electoral strategies. Caste is one of the important variable in deciding the nature of the Indian polity from grassroots to the national level. Scholars like Rajni Kothari, Partha Chatterjee argued that caste is the persistent variable of the Indian polity. It comes in different 'avatars' in different times. State politics which is at the middle level of the Indian politics has clear reflections of the caste politics. Political leadership keeps the caste variables in focus while they frame their electoral strategies. Caste in both the states has prominent position in the society. Its social institutions and roles are caste based and those practices and institutions have clear-cut ramification in the state polity. According to Shah and Jani in (Palishkar 2014) both the parties have their rough estimation of numerical strength of major castes, the parties give due to importance to aspirant's caste in relation to caste configuration in the respective constituency, (Shah and Jani 2014: 113). According to Giri (2017) in Gujarat both the dominant and the dominated castes can come together. A contingent "anti BJP" stance or an even "thinner" anti-incumbency now gets uncannily articulated through the dense political radicalism. Then the opposition to Modi's 2017 "vibrant Gujarat" celebration joined by the leaders of the three communities, Patel-Thakor-Dalit "us" (the people) is created against them, (Giri, 2017: 15-16).

Caste based reservation are not new to Gujarat. Any discussion of caste in Gujarat harks back to the 1980s, when MadhavSinh Solanki, the Ex-chief minister of Gujarat devised an innovative social formula called the KHAM- a political alliance of Kshatriya, Harijan, Adivasi and Muslim. Patel community formed the BJP's primary vote bank since as far back as 1985 when Congress leader MadhavSinh Solanki alienated them with his anti-Patel and pro-backward KHAM (Kshatriya, Harijan, Adivasi and Muslim) strategy, (Marino, 2014: 57). Patel's form the 14 Per cent of Gujarat's population. In the 2017 election, the Congress made a serious attempt to craft a winning coalition along similar lines, one that included the Patel's, other backward classes (OBCs), and Dalits. The party forged alliances with three young leaders Hardik Patel, Alpesh Thakor and Jignesh Mevani representing three distinct caste blocs- the Patel's, OBCs and Dalits respectively. Electoral history of Gujarat indicates the Congress's traditional vote bank mainly rests with the OBC and scheduled caste (SC). KHAM strategy reinforced the Congress base among them in the 1970s and 1980s, (for detail see Palishkar 2014: 100-122). In 2017 elections Congress strived to capture the Patidar vote by including their demand for reservation in their agenda.

The young Dalit lawyer Jignesh Mevani, who gained prominence after the public flogging of Dalit in Una, Hardik Patel, who tried to mobilise the Patidar community to vote against the BJP and Alpesh Thakor, who voiced the anger of one section of the backward classes added a great deal of colour and interests to the Gujarat election. But what was evident then and even more so now, is that separately and together they are not part of a cohesive alternative. It is possible that this could yet emerge, (EPW, December 23, 2017: 7). The BJP has fielded 50 Patidar candidates while the Congress fielded 41. The Congress has 62 OBC candidates and the BJP has 58. As far as Dalit candidates are concerned, the BJP fielded 13, while the Congress fielded 14 candidates.

The challenge comes from the opposition and discontented minority of Gujarat. The community that feels side-lined by the ruling government are Dalits (7%), OBCs (37%) and Patidars (14%), who form a major mass of the population of the state. Taking the opportunity, Congress who long has been out of power in the state is trying to woo the minority of the state by supporting leaders such as Jignesh Mevani, Hardik Patel and Alpesh Thakore, (TOI, December 18, 2017). In Gujarat election 2017, both the parties tried to manage the caste configuration in such a way in which they could won the maximum seats. In this field Congress's alliance with three young leaders from three main communities which were BJP's main vote share in the previous elections was an effort to shift the vote bank on the caste lines. Ticket distribution of both the parties also clarify party position in this regard. Both the parties kept in mind caste factors while allocated tickets. In election campaign also caste was the main agenda.

**Caste Table 1.1:-**

<b>Caste</b>	<b>BJP Vote Share</b>	<b>Congress Vote Share</b>	<b>Others Vote Share</b>
Rajputs & Brahmin	61%	27%	12%
Leuva Patels	48%	43%	9%
Kadva Patels	42%	50%	8%
Other Patels	53%	37%	10%
Kolis	50%	39%	11%
Thakore OBC	45%	46%	9%

Other OBC	57%	32%	11%
SC	53%	39%	8%
ST	46%	47%	7%
Muslim	27%	64%	9%

**Source:** India Today, January 1, 2018. pp. 46.

Table 1.1 reflects the voter gave less importance to the caste issue. Three youngsters appealed their communities to vote keeping in mind the narrow community interests. Vote share in the table reflects that such appeals have little impact on the caste lines. Loss of BJP seats was due to rural-urban factor rather than caste on the contrary voters had less consideration for that.

Though caste does not make or break poll prospects of politicians in Himachal Pradesh, it plays a crucial role in the hill states polity. In Himachal Pradesh traditional institutions like caste, class patriarchy and feudal practices are common in the society as a whole those are manifested in the Himachal politics specifically. Barring 20 reserved constituencies, majority of the candidates in the list are from the dominant upper castes (Brahmin and Rajputs). State leadership always belong to the Rajputs except the Shanta Kumar who was Brahmin leader from Kangra. In the thirteenth assembly elections both the main parties declared Rajput leaders Virbhadra Singh (Congress) and Prem Kumar Dhumal (BJP) as their Chief Ministerial candidates. Rajput constitute 34% of the total population of the state, OBC 32%, Brahmins 20% and Gujjar, Gaddi and SC 14%. 'While SCs are evenly distributed all across the Himachal, majority of STs are concentrated in upper reaches (the scheduled areas of Kinnaur, Lahaul & Spiti and Chamba). The majority of the state's population consists of the two upper casts, Rajput and Brahmin, with the former being numerically stronger with a presence of around 34 per cent', (Sardesai, 2014: 184). Tickets are also allocated keeping in mind the caste configurations in the state. BJP gave 28 tickets to Rajput, 9 to Brahmin, five to OBCs, seventeen reserved SC and three Tribal candidates. Considering the fact that politics in Himachal Pradesh is largely dominated by the upper castes, the parties stirred up caste-based poll strategies in order to shake the competition. Both the main political parties, the BJP and Congress, give due consideration to the caste factor while selecting candidates. In a surprise move, BJP nominated Prem Kumar Dhumal as its chief ministerial candidate, largely owing to the caste-factor dominant in the state politics. This development was followed shortly after the Congress party announced the 83 year old Virbhadra Singh as their chief ministerial candidate for the Himachal Pradesh. Both the parties' had dependence on the Thakur vote to win the elections.

Himachal Society is a typical caste based society. Its 90% population resides in the villages. Villages system follows strictly caste practices. Untouchability is still prevalent and common among the rural Himachalis. In the states, still Thakurs and Brahmins enjoy high status in the society. Caste practices in the electoral politics have been common. 'Castism is a ubiquitous evil of Indian political life...as evidenced during assembly party leaders elections in Bihar and Himachal' (1978), (Limaye, 1994: 541). After seventy years of independence Thakur feel privileged being rulers of the society and both the parties try to encash this attitude in the political institutions also. Both the parties allocate their tickets keeping in mind the caste factor. It is observed in the last twenty years, there is difference between the voters and politicians attitude during the election process. Politicians give more importance to the caste factor in allocation of the tickets and during the campaigns they appeal on the caste basis. Voters give less importance to the caste and more to the development issues at the time of casting the vote. Leadership in both the states keep caste factor in the centre stage. Congress's strategy in 1950s and 1960s enhanced the already dominant middle and upper castes in local arena. Afterwards with the rise of the other backward classes (OBCs) caste configuration changed. Both the parties always tried to manipulate the dominant castes by offering them freebies during the elections. During the selection of the candidates personal virtues dominated by the caste status of the individuals in both the states. 'Thus, both Congress and BJP have fairly stable social bases and only a slight volatility in those produces the alternation between the fortunes of the two parties. Small swings can tilt the scales in any direction in this typical two party system and this along with performance makes factors like popularity of leaders, effective campaigning and curbing factionalism crucial to electoral outcomes', (Sardesai, 2014: 187).

Analysis of the electoral politics in both the states reflect the same trends besides the difference in rural-urban ratio. Caste has distinct institution in both the societies and it has its impact on the state policy. Leadership give more importance to the caste factor. Allocation of tickets, in the formation of governments, leadership consider the caste as important variable. Voting pattern indicate the voters are less caste driven in both societies. It is true that class of politicians make every effort to exploit the caste factor for their own benefits.

**Economic Profile of the Candidates: Class the Determining Factor:**

As many as 418 of the 1815 candidates contesting the Gujarat Assembly election 2017 are crorepatis, with total assets worth more than Rs 1 crore, survey conducted by Association of Democratic Rights (ADR) of self-declaration of assets by candidates in their affidavits. Of the total 418 crorepatis candidates 147 of them from BJP alone. The party has two candidates- Saurabh Yashvantbhai Dalal Patel and Dhanjibhai Patel- among the top 5 richest candidates. The Congress Party comes second in the number of crorepati candidates, with 129 candidates worth more than 1 crore property. The party has three of its candidates among the top five richest candidates. Pankajbhai Chimanbhai Patel from the Congress, with worth more than 231 crore is the most-richest candidate in this election, (Business Standard, December 12, 2017).

Out of the 182 newly elected MLAs, 141 (77%) are crorepatis. Out of 182 MLAs analysed during Gujarat 2012 assembly elections, 134 (74%) were crorepatis. Party-wise crorepati MLAs, 84 from BJP, 54 from INC, two from Bharatiya Tribal Party and one from NCP. The average assets per MLA in the Gujarat 2017 assembly election was Rs 8.46 crore, while the same was Rs 8.03 crore in 2012. The average asset per MLA for 99 BJP analysed is Rs 10.64 crore, 77 INC MLAs (5.85 crore), 2 Bharatiya Tribal Party MLAs (2.71 crore) and 3 independents (53.86 Lakh), (Ibid.).

In Himachal Pradesh Assembly polls 2017, Out of the 68 MLAs, 52 (76%) are crorepatis. It was 44 (65%) was in 2012 assembly elections. Among party wise crorepati MLAs, 21 MLAs from the Congress, 28 out of 44 MLAs from BJP, one MLA from CPI(M) and two independents. Out of total 338 contestants, 158 (47%) were crorepatis. The average assets per candidate contesting the assembly election 2017 is Rs 4.07 crore," Delhi-based think tank ADR said in a report. Among party wise crorepati candidates, 59 out of 68 candidates from Congress, 47 of 68 from the BJP, 6 of 42 from the BSP, 3 of the 14 from the CPI (M), 1 of 3 from the CPI and 36 of 112 independents have declared assets worth more than 1 crore, it said, (Indian Express, November 1, 2017). According to census 2011, in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh per capita income is 1,38,023 and 1,47,277 respectively, which is higher than the per capita income at the national level. Given data of the contestants and MLAs indicate that the people are represented by the well off strata of the society. Lower middle class and the poor masses have little scope to enter in the formal political institutions. It may be the implication of rising election expenditure in the country. In both the states affluent class is managing the political affairs.

**Criminal Status of the Candidates:**

Analysis of criminal charges against candidates, out of 182 newly elected candidates in Gujarat assembly, 47 (25.8 per cent) have criminal cases registered against them, data released by Gujarat Election Watch (GEW) and Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) has revealed. It implies that every fourth MLA, faces a criminal case, showing a dip in comparison to the assembly elected in 2012, when 57 (31%) MLAs had declared criminal cases against themselves. Congress has the maximum number of MLAs who have criminal cases against them. Out of the 77 elected legislators, 25 (32%) declared criminal cases in their affidavits. While the MLAs from BJP who have criminal cases registered against them is 18 (18.1%). On the other side in the Himachal Pradesh assembly elections, out of the total 338 contestants, 61 (18%) have declared criminal cases against them out of 61 candidates, 31 (9%) of the total candidates have declared serious cases against them. Party wise candidates with criminal cases are 6 from Congress, 23 from BJP, 3 from BSP, 10 From the CPI (M) and 16 independents have declared criminal cases against them in their affidavit, (Ibid.).

**Women in Electoral Politics:**

Analysis of women representation, out of the 182 MLAs in Gujarat, 13 are women (nine from BJP and four from Congress) elected to the assembly against 16 in 2012. The BJP and Congress fielded 12 and 10 women candidates in the 2017 assembly elections respectively. While in Himachal Pradesh, out of 68 MLAs, four are women against three in 2012. In Himachal Pradesh total 19 women in the fray this time. This data shows that women have not got enough representation in the both state assembly elections. Just three Muslims and 13 women candidates have been elected. This shows that every section is not properly represented in the elections.

**Nota Impact:**

Introduced in 2013, "none of the above" (NOTA) option has gradually become a notable part of the Indian elections. 'NOTA' is a choice of negative voting in certain electoral systems to help the voters express their dissent for all the candidates competing in an election, (Vachana and Roy, 2018: 28-31). In the highly charged 2017 Gujarat assembly elections, NOTA gathered 5.5 Lakh votes (1.8%), which is more than the votes for the two national parties (NCP

and BSP), and surpassed the winning margins in over a dozen constituencies. Similarly, the percentage of votes cast in favour of NOTA in Himachal Pradesh was 0.9 per cent. Around 34,000 people in Himachal Pradesh did not vote for any of the candidate, (Ibid.). This trends shows that at least a small number of Indian voters have come to see NOTA as an instrument of protest against many things that they believe is problematic within the political system of the country.

BJP is the popular choice of people Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. NOTA was the fourth most popular choice of the people in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. Most people in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh voted for BJP, followed by Congress. The third place was occupied by Independents candidates while the fourth most popular option was NOTA, (India Today, December 19, 2017). Vachana observed on the basis of statistical data ‘across elections, there is higher usage of NOTA in the states, where the India national Congress and the BJP were engaged in a direct contest...This may be an indication of people’s disenchantment with two mainstream parties and preference for strong credible alternate’, (Vachana and Roy, 2018: 28-31).

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