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Name of Scholar: **Sabah Hussain**

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Nisar ul Haq

Name of R.A.C. Members: Dr. Muslim Khan, Dr. Bulbul Dhar James

Name of the Department: Political Science

Topic of Research:

Gender Bargain and Cultural Construction of Identity: A Study of Women of Rajasthan

Findings

This research employs feminist political analysis to examine power dynamics across public and private spheres, contributing to gender and politics scholarship through discursive institutionalist approaches and intersectional frameworks.

The theoretical foundation utilizes feminist epistemology, standpoint theory, and intersectionality to analyse cultural identity constructions. Methodologically, the study applies grounded ethnography in Rajasthan, examining political agency indicators to understand how Muslim women navigate identity within power matrices and postcolonial contexts.

The research addresses scholarly gaps by challenging essentialist representations of Muslim women's agency in Rajasthan and examining negotiation strategies against intersecting oppressive systems. It advances understanding of relationships between individual agency and structural constraints in gendered identity formation.

Findings:

By examining women's negotiations within societal structures, it highlights the nuanced mechanisms they use to navigate and challenge social norms. The research identifies three forms of gender bargaining in Rajasthan: performative, silent, and adaptive. These interrelated strategies illustrate the multifaceted approaches women employ to navigate societal constraints and achieve their goals.

1. Performative Bargain:

Women engage in actions that outwardly conform to societal expectations while subtly advancing their own objectives. This involves participating in political activities without necessarily having substantive influence or understanding. It's characterized by symbolic participation, such as voting based on social pressures rather than informed decisions. This bargain is particularly evident in the political behaviour of both Hindu and Muslim women in Rajasthan.

2. Adaptive Bargain:

This represents a strategic negotiation between individual agency and societal constraints. Women navigate gender expectations through calculated compromises and selective adherence to norms. It manifests differently across communities - for example, lower-caste Hindu women framing employment as obligation rather than empowerment, or the practice of veiling serving different purposes for different groups. This bargain challenges simplistic notions of oppression or empowerment, revealing complex strategies for maintaining autonomy within existing power structures.

3. Tacit Bargain:

This involves subtle strategies employed by marginalized women to navigate structural constraints while exercising personal agency. It's exemplified by practices like veiling or specific voting behaviours among Muslim women, which, while appearing as compliance with patriarchal norms, actually serve as means for self-actualization and agency cultivation. This bargain often manifests in seemingly contradictory behaviours, such as adhering to social norms while simultaneously negotiating spaces of autonomy within those constraints.

Keywords:

Gender Bargain, Intersectionality, Muslim Women, Agency, Identity, Rajasthan