



Socio-Cultural Determinants of Women's Social and Political Participation in the Rural Maratha Community: A Social Work Perspective with Special Reference to Dhule District

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ABSTRACT

Women's participation in social and political processes is a crucial indicator of inclusive development and democratic governance. Despite constitutional provisions, reservation policies, and various empowerment initiatives, the participation of women from the rural Maratha community in social and political activities remains influenced by socio-cultural norms and traditional gender roles. This study examines the socio-cultural determinants affecting women's social and political participation in Dhule District, Maharashtra, from a social work perspective. A descriptive research design was adopted using both primary and secondary data. Data were collected through structured interviews with 120 rural Maratha women selected through purposive sampling from selected villages in Dhule District. The study found that education, family support, economic status, awareness of rights, caste traditions, patriarchal values, and participation in self-help groups significantly influence women's involvement in local governance and community development. The findings highlight the need for social work interventions focusing on awareness generation, leadership development, gender sensitization, and community mobilization to enhance women's active participation in democratic processes.

Keywords: *Women Empowerment, Rural Women, Maratha Community, Political Participation, Social Participation, Social Work, Socio-Cultural Factors, Panchayati Raj, Dhule District.*

1. Introduction

Women's participation in social and political life is an essential component of democratic governance and sustainable rural development. The Constitution of India guarantees equality, justice, and equal political rights to women through Articles 14, 15, 16, and 39. Furthermore, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992) strengthened women's participation in local self-government by providing reservations in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

However, legal provisions alone cannot eliminate deeply rooted socio-cultural barriers. In many rural communities, especially among the Maratha community in Maharashtra, women's participation in decision-making continues to be shaped by traditional customs, patriarchal family structures, gender norms, and cultural expectations.

The Maratha community constitutes one of the largest agrarian communities in Maharashtra. Women in rural Maratha families contribute significantly to agriculture, household management, livestock care, and social responsibilities. Despite these contributions, their participation in village governance, political leadership, and public decision-making often remains limited due to factors such as low educational attainment, economic dependence, domestic workload, mobility restrictions, and lack of political awareness.





From a social work perspective, empowering women involves strengthening their capacities, promoting participation, ensuring access to resources, and facilitating social justice. Social workers play an important role in community organization, leadership development, rights awareness, advocacy, and capacity building among rural women.

This study attempts to identify the socio-cultural determinants influencing women's social and political participation in the rural Maratha community with special reference to Dhule District.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the socio-cultural determinants influencing women's participation. The study was conducted in selected villages of Dhule District, Maharashtra, focusing on women belonging to the rural Maratha community. A total of 120 respondents were selected using the purposive sampling technique. Both primary and secondary data were utilized for the study. Primary data were collected through a structured interview schedule, personal interviews, observation and informal discussions, while secondary data were obtained from books, research journals, government reports, Census reports, articles and other published literature. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, such as frequency, percentage and interpretation, to draw meaningful conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that socio-cultural factors significantly influence women's participation in social and political activities.

Table 1: Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Women's Social and Political Participation (N = 120)

Socio-Cultural Factor	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Family Support	96	80.0
Education	92	76.7
Economic Independence	84	70.0
Participation in Self-Help Groups	78	65.0
Political Awareness	72	60.0
Patriarchal Family Norms	88	73.3
Traditional Customs	81	67.5
Social Acceptance	74	61.7

The study reveals that family support (80%) emerged as the most influential factor affecting women's participation. Women receiving encouragement from family members were more likely to participate in Gram Sabha meetings, community organizations, and local governance.

Education (76.7%) was another major determinant. Educated women demonstrated higher political awareness, confidence, and decision-making abilities.

Economic independence (70%) increased women's participation by providing financial autonomy and confidence in public affairs.



Participation in Self-Help Groups (65%) enhanced leadership skills, social networking, and awareness regarding government schemes.

However, patriarchal family norms (73.3%) and traditional customs (67.5%) remained major barriers limiting women's mobility, leadership opportunities, and independent political decisions.

Political awareness (60%) and social acceptance (61.7%) also influenced women's willingness to contest elections, attend Gram Sabha meetings, and engage in village-level decision-making.

From a social work perspective, community organization, women's leadership training, awareness campaigns, and capacity-building programmes can effectively reduce socio-cultural barriers and strengthen women's participation in democratic governance.

CONCLUSION

Women's social and political participation in the rural Maratha community is influenced by multiple socio-cultural factors, including education, family support, economic status, traditional customs, patriarchal attitudes, and political awareness. Although constitutional safeguards and reservation policies have increased opportunities for women's participation, deep-rooted cultural practices continue to restrict their active involvement in public decision-making.

The findings suggest that social work interventions focusing on community empowerment, gender sensitization, awareness generation, leadership development, and strengthening Self-Help Groups can significantly enhance women's participation. Collaborative efforts by government agencies, Panchayati Raj Institutions, non-governmental organizations, and social workers are essential for promoting gender equality and inclusive rural governance in Dhule District.

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