

Women's Leadership and Political Participation: An Analytical Study (With Reference to the Gram Panchayat of Rajnandgaon District)

Dr. (Mrs.) Kirani Tigga

Assistant Professor (Political Science)
Government Rajmata Vijaya Raje Scindia Girls' College
Kawardha, District - Kabirdham (Chhattisgarh)

Abstract:

The present research is based on the topic "Women's Leadership and Political Participation: An Analytical Study" (with special reference to the Gram Panchayat of Rajnandgaon district). Women's leadership and political participation are crucial foundations for the strength of any democratic system. In a vast and diverse country like India, women's political participation is considered essential for social justice, equality, and inclusive development. This paper analyzes the concept of women's leadership, the current state of women's participation in politics, the challenges they face, and measures for empowerment. The study reveals that although constitutional provisions and policy efforts have increased women's participation, their role in actual decision-making remains limited.

Keywords: Women's leadership, political participation, empowerment, democracy, gender equality.

POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Leadership is the ability to guide society, and when women assume this role, governance becomes more sensitive, inclusive, and balanced. The history of women's political participation in India is linked to the independence movement, where women played an active role. Despite this, women's participation in politics after independence has remained relatively low.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The proposed study is based on the book "Women's Leadership and Political Participation in the State-Level Political System: An Analytical Study (with Special Reference to the Gram Panchayat of Rajnandgaon District)." It proposes a detailed study of the status of women's leadership participation and challenges after the implementation of the Panchayati Raj system, with the specific reference to the Gram Panchayat of Rajnandgaon district. The proposed study has the following objectives:

1. To understand the concept of women's leadership.
2. To study the status of women's political participation in India.
3. To analyze the major challenges faced by women leaders.

STUDY AREA

The study area of Rajnandgaon district extends from latitude 20.07°N to latitude 22.29°N and longitude 80.2°E to longitude 81.24°E. Its average elevation above ground level is 330.78 meters. Its total area is 9202.36 square kilometers. It is bordered by Kawardha to the north, Durg to the east, and Bastar to the south. The district's western border shares some borders with Gondia district of Maharashtra and Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh. It shares some borders with Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh. Besides its rich mineral and forest resources, it holds significant commercial and political significance.

Administratively, the district comprises eight tehsils and nine development blocks, of which Manpur, Mohla, and Ambagarh Chowki are Scheduled Tribe-dominated development blocks. The district has 3 towns, 952 inhabited villages, 1001 revenue villages, 10 forest villages, 59 deserted villages, 632 gram panchayats, and 2 municipal corporations. There are a total of 9 Janpad Panchayats in the district. According to the 2001 census, the total population of the district is 1,281,811, of which 539,726 have an urban density of 159, a sex ratio of 1,024, and a literacy rate of 77.58%. Rajnandgaon district is the most literate district in Chhattisgarh.

Rajnandgaon district is primarily a farming-dominated district. However, the Dongargarh Devi Temple is the largest pilgrimage site in Chhattisgarh. By providing women political opportunities through the Panchayati Raj system, they will be better equipped to fight against inequality, injustice, and exploitation. Furthermore, through political participation in society, they can play a significant role in the development of women at the rural level. Study Methods of the Proposed Research. The methodology of the proposed research will be divided into the following parts. 1. Selection of the study area. 2. Unit of study In the proposed study, it is proposed to analyze the political participation of women representatives elected in the Gram Panchayat of Rajnandgaon district as a unit of study. Selection of respondents: For the proposed study, the Gram Panchayat women representatives of the study area Rajnandgaon are to be selected through multi-level guidance. Under which, the women representatives of the same four development blocks are selected through purposeful guidance and from among them, a total of 300 respondents including the women representatives for the study are selected through random guidance.

DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY, TECHNIQUES, AND TOOLS

Data collection for the proposed research will be conducted in two ways:

1. Primary Sources
2. Secondary Sources

Primary Sources - This will include data collection through interview schedules with representatives from the development blocks with a majority of women in the study area.

Secondary Sources - This will include various government forms and documents related to women's political participation and the Panchayati Raj system in the study area, and research papers published periodically in magazines and newspapers, as well as material available on the Internet.

DATA COLLECTION

Based on the nature of the respondents, interviews with the Gram Panchayat will be conducted through a schedule, and interviews with women representatives will be conducted through a schedule. Furthermore, data collection will be conducted through group discussions and observation techniques with people in the study area.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:

Since ancient times, leadership in India has always been male-dominated, regardless of the form of the system—monarchy, dictatorship, aristocracy, or modern democratic systems. It's clear that national leadership, regardless of the world, has largely been in the hands of men. After India's independence, with the exception of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's tenure, national leadership has been largely held by men for the past 70 years. Today, from Panchayats to Parliament, men hold power as Chief Ministers in most states. At the national level, the Prime Minister and key cabinet members are also men. When it comes to leadership, all national parties have repeatedly advocated for 33 percent reservation for women in Parliament since 2000. However, this has been hampered by one issue or another, and women have been overlooked. Nevertheless, women in India have established their leadership through their efficiency, and today, in most states, whether it's administrative or political leadership, they hold sway. Women have

delivered better results than men, and therefore, the expansion and development of women's leadership has become not only necessary but also essential. When it comes to national development, no country can become developed by ignoring women, who constitute half the country's population. Keeping this in mind, after the formation of Chhattisgarh, the BJP government here established the first step in politics by providing women with 50 percent reservation in Gram Panchayats, giving them leadership at the primary level, which has yielded positive results. Today, thanks to 50 percent reservation for women from all categories in every Gram Panchayat in Chhattisgarh, they are participating in meetings from the district administration to the state level. They are gaining knowledge of government policies, schemes, and programs and are effectively managing them. Initially, some women representatives faced difficulties due to illiteracy. However, gradually, with the entry of educated women into politics, this problem is also being alleviated. Today, in Rajnandgaon district, despite being a tribal-dominated and Naxal-affected district, women's leadership has left an indelible mark. For example, Phulwasan Bai of Rajnandgaon district was awarded the Padmashree by the Central Government for empowering thousands of women through self-help groups in gram panchayats, raising public awareness, and instilling in them self-confidence in employment. She remains a role model for many women today. The various welfare initiatives initiated by the state government from time to time for women are serving as a vital link in advancing these initiatives. These programs, including education, health, self-employment schemes, scholarships, hostel facilities, Anganwadi Scheme, Mitandin Programme, free bicycles, books, free education, and free coaching for reserved categories, have brought about unprecedented revolutionary changes in the field of education for women, fostering women's leadership and creating new dimensions for women's empowerment. Today, in Rajnandgaon district of Chhattisgarh, women leaders in municipalities, municipal corporations, and gram panchayats have proven that they are indistinguishable from men in political and social participation. Various central and state government schemes have played a significant role in developing leadership skills. Women are no longer dependent on men for leadership in any field. In fact, the results of schools and colleges in the Rajnandgaon district, the study area, show that women have the highest number of female employees in the list of educational personnel, as women are advancing day by day in the quality of education and in the merit list. This has become the greatest means of strengthening their leadership capabilities. Political participation means that rural women are directly involved in decision-making, policy implementation, political participation, and the administrative process. Rural participation is a form of public participation. Public participation does not only mean financial and physical assistance, but also that all development programs are for them and that their problems are addressed. The aim is to instill in the rural population the belief that development programs belong to them and that only with their cooperation can development programs be implemented effectively. Thus, any type of public participation, whether political or administrative, is part of development administration. In real sense, when a citizen becomes aware of his responsibility and takes part in development works, then it is called citizen participation. Similarly, being involved in the activities of policy making, implementation and review is participation. In a broad sense, participation means providing every citizen in a democracy with the opportunity to actively participate in creative works apart from the right to vote. In a narrow sense, participation means a specific action by which citizens get involved in public affairs for achieving a specific objective. Participation can be direct and indirect, formal and informal, political, social or administrative in nature.

Table No. 01- Regularity of Women's Attendance at Panchayat Meetings

S. No.	Opinion	frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes	137	45.67
2.	No	140	46.67
3.	Can't say anything	13	4.33
4.	Did not understand the question	10	3.33

	Total	300	100
--	-------	-----	-----

The table above reveals that 45.67 percent of respondents believe that women regularly attend Panchayat meetings, while 46.67 percent believe that women are unable to participate regularly. Because they have many family responsibilities, they first fulfill their family responsibilities and then use the remaining time to handle Panchayat and social work. 4.33 percent of respondents did not answer this question because they migrate to other states and therefore have no knowledge of local activities. Another 3.33 percent of respondents did not understand the question, primarily because they are completely illiterate.

Table No. 02- Women's social status increases as they gain leadership in Panchayats

S. No.	Opinion	Frequency	percentage
1.	Yes	203	67.67
2.	No	67	22.33
3.	Can't say anything	20	6.67
4.	Did not understand the question	10	3.33
	Total	300	100

Analysis of the table shows that 67.67 percent of the respondents believe that providing leadership to women in Panchayats has increased their social status. Whereas 22.33 percent of the respondents expressed their disagreement in this regard. They believe that even today in practice, only what the male class wants happens in the society and the voice of women is ignored. While 6.67 percent of the respondents did not say anything in this regard. Similarly, 3.33 percent of the respondents could not understand this question because they are all laborers and have nothing to do with society or politics. They say that for us, filling our stomachs is the biggest achievement.

Table No. 03- The impact of political participation on the social level

S. No.	Opinion	Frequency	percentage
1.	Yes	152	50.67
2.	No	106	35.33
3.	Can't say anything	29	9.67
4.	Did not understand the question	13	4.33
	Total	300	100

The above analysis reveals that 50.67 percent of respondents agree that women's political participation impacts their social status, giving them influence in society and raising their social status. However, 35.33 percent disagreed. 9.67 percent remained neutral. 4.33 percent of respondents did not provide any information because they did not understand the question.

Table No. 04- Women Sarpanches face political interference

S. No.	Opinion	frequency	percentage
1.	Yes	155	51.67
2.	No	67	32.67
3.	Can't say anything	65	11.33
4.	Did not understand the question	13	4.33
	Total	300	100

The above analysis reveals that 51.67 percent of respondents believe that women Sarpanchs often face political interference. While 32.67 percent disagreed, saying that political interference has become commonplace today, and not only women Sarpanchs but male Sarpanchs also face it. 11.33 percent of

respondents remained completely neutral on this issue. 4.33 percent of respondents did not provide any information because they did not understand the question.

CONCLUSION

Political participation is crucial to all currently existing systems, including the democratic system. Political participation is essential for its sustainable foundation and strength. Without it, the success of the democratic system may be questioned. In other words, participation is the very foundation of democratic governance, as it is governed by the people. In the 20th century, all political systems, whether authoritarian or democratic, conservative, or reactionary, empower their citizens to participate in politics and encourage them to do so. Because the more political participation expands, the more stable, popular and powerful the system will be. In India, after the 1980s, mid-term elections have weakened India's parliamentary democratic system, because whether it is the state or the center, where there is a coalition government, the political system remains weak and unstable. Because the percentage of public participation is weak there.

Political participation is a major means of giving or withdrawing consent in a democratic system, through which the rulers are made accountable to the governed. Political participation is defined as those voluntary actions through which members of the society participate directly or indirectly in the selection of rulers and in the formulation of public policies.

Currently, rural populations in various countries are using various means to achieve their goals. In recent general elections, rural populations have exercised their right to vote. Following reservations for women, their political participation increased, leading to women being elected to various positions within the three-tier Panchayati Raj system, providing them with opportunities to provide leadership in rural areas. Women have played a significant role in political change in rural areas.

Analysis reveals that 58.67 percent of respondents agree that social participation at the rural level is increasing political influence. While 32.33 percent completely disagreed, 6.33 percent remained completely neutral. The remaining 2.67 percent did not understand the question.

In the current environment, many educated graduate and postgraduate women are providing commendable leadership as Sarpanchs at the rural level and are increasing social awareness among women. A living example of this can be seen when an educated woman in Chhattisgarh, dedicated to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, turned away the wedding guests who had come to her wedding venue, saying that she would not marry until a permanent toilet was constructed in her house. This has been appreciated throughout the state. Therefore, today, women's leadership, women's public awareness, and women's political and social participation are rapidly developing. Women's responsibilities in social and political participation are considered the greatest achievement towards women's empowerment. In the study area, Rajnandgaon district, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Beti Padhao Beti Bachao" program is being successfully implemented by women sarpanches, which is commendable. Through women's social and political participation, women in gram panchayats are achieving significant results. By providing effective leadership, a new direction and condition is being given to the Gram Panchayats in Chhattisgarh, which will prove to be the biggest contribution of women in improving the fate and image of the Gram Panchayats.

REFERENCES:

1. Sharma, Hariom, Women's Role in Political Participation in Rural Areas: Emerging Models of Rural Leadership, Arjun Publishing House, New Delhi, 2004, p. 75.
2. Kukreja, Sundarlal, The Need to Strengthen the Panchayat Raj System, Kurukshetra, p. 11.



3. Puri, S., The Indian Political System or Indian Governance and Politics, New Academic Publishing Company, Jalandhar, p. 301.
4. Giri, D.K.: Pupil Participation and Rural Development, Kurukshetra, New Delhi, 2002, p. 11.
5. P.R. Dubhashi, Administration and the Citizen, Volume 1, July 1975, p. 28.
6. Gaina, Hari B., Modern Political Theory, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2004, pp. 330–332. Interview
7. McGloxié, Herbert: Political Participation in David, edited by David, volume 12, p. 253.
8. Bharti, Dr. Dharamveer: Political Sociology, Rajasthan Hindi Granth Academy, Jaipur, 1998, p. 151. Ibid., p. 152.