

A STUDY ON PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN GRAM SABHA WITH REFERENCE TO KARVEER TALUKA OF MAHARASHTRA STATE

Manjusha Mohite

Assistant Professor

Department of Yashwantrao Chavan School of Rural Development (YCSRD)
Shivaji University, Kolhapur, India

Abstract : Women's participation in grassroots democracy is a key indicator of inclusive governance. The present study focuses on women's participation in the Gram Sabha (village assembly) in Karveer taluka of Kolhapur District, Maharashtra. It examines the level of attendance, decision engagement, influence on decisions, factors that enables or hindering participation, and suggests ways to strengthen their involvement. The study uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches with a sample drawn from several villages in the taluka. The findings are shedding lights on socioeconomic, cultural and other some other kinds of barriers and inform policy/practice for more meaningful women's participation in Gram Sabha's.

IndexTerms- *Gram sabha; Panchayati Raj institution; rural development; women representatives; local governance*

INTRODUCTION

The Gram Sabha is a constitutionally envisaged platform under the Panchayati Raj system in India, where every registered voter of a village is a member and can participate in decision-making on local governance, development and welfare matters. Despite women constituting roughly half of the rural population, their active involvement in Gram Sabhas remains limited in many parts of India.

Research shows that women's attendance and voice in Gram Sabhas is often low, due to a combination of socio-cultural constraints, domestic responsibilities, low awareness of rights, institutional scheduling issues and patriarchal norms. In Maharashtra particularly, while the local governance system has attempted to empower women such as through reservations in Panchayati Raj Institutions, the translation into meaningful participation in Gram Sabha continues to be a challenge.

In the context of Karveer taluka of Kolhapur District, which comprises a mix of rural villages and semi-urban settings, studying women's participation in Gram Sabhas provides insights into how local context shapes governance engagement. This study thus aims to assess the current levels of women's participation, identify enablers and barriers, and propose recommendations for strengthening women's role in local decision-making.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To study the extent of women's attendance and active participation in Gram Sabha meetings in Karveer taluka.
2. To analyse socio-economic, cultural and institutional factors that influence women's participation.
3. To study women's awareness about their rights, obligations and the functioning of Gram Sabha.
4. To identify the major challenges faced by women in participating meaningfully in Gram Sabha meetings.
5. To suggest practical recommendations to enhance women's participation in Gram Sabha in the study area.

Population and Sample

a) Research Design:

The study adopts a descriptive research design, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and observations to provide a comprehensive understanding of participation patterns.

b) Study Area:

Karveer Taluka in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra is the focus area for study. A purposive selection of villages within the taluka of 2 villages has been made to ensure representation from different socio-economic conditions, villages with higher literacy to capture variation in women's participation.

c) Sampling:

Sample size: Target of 40 women respondents across selected villages.

Sampling method: Stratified random sampling – strata based on socio-economic status, age group, educational level. Within each village, women who are registered voters will be selected randomly.

In addition, key informant interviews will be conducted with village panchayat members, Gram Sabha organisers, women self-help group leaders, and a subset of women who regularly attend in Gram Sabha.

Data and Sources of Data

Primary data: Structured questionnaire administered to women respondents covering: attendance frequency in Gram Sabha; reasons for attending or not; active engagement in discussions; awareness of Gram Sabha powers; perceived influence on decisions;

socio-economic profile (age, education, occupation, household income). Qualitative interviews and focus group discussions had explored perceptions, institutional aspects (time/venue of meeting, facilitation, female presence), barriers such as domestic obligations, mobility, cultural norms. Observations of a few Gram Sabha meetings has recorded women's seating, engagement, voice-opportunity.

Secondary data: Official records of Gram Sabha meetings in selected villages (attendance lists, number of women present, resolutions passed), Panchayat records, district/ state level reports on women's participation in local governance, literature review on women participation in Gram Sabhas.

Data Analysis:

Quantitative data is analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages, frequency distributions) and cross-tabulations (e.g., participation by education level, occupation). Qualitative data is undergo thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns such as cultural constraints, institutional facilitation, scheduling issues.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results:

1. Women's attendance rate in Gram Sabha in Karveer taluka is low to moderate, with many women attending as passive participants rather than active contributors.
2. Socioeconomic factors such as higher education, membership in self-help groups, and household income are correlate positively with higher participation.
3. Cultural/institutional barriers are emerge strongly: domestic responsibilities (childcare, household chores), restricted mobility, timing of meetings inconvenient for women, male dominance in proceedings, lack of women-specific outreach or seating arrangements.
4. Awareness among women about the Gram Sabha powers, their rights as voters/participants, and how to voice demands is limited.
5. Institutional facets: Gram Sabha scheduling (time and venue), facilitation (how women are invited, seating, recognition of women's questions), and presence of panchayat officials has affect the nature of participation.

The result also show that where women have engaged via self-help groups, or where women elected representatives exist, participation is relatively stronger.

Based on these, the study is recommend practical measures for enhancing women's participation: shifting meeting time and venue to more women-friendly slots, organizing capacity-building programme for women about Gram Sabha functions, encouraging separate "Mahila Sabha" (women's assembly) leading into Gram Sabha, engaging male community members in gender sensitization, ensuring women's seating and voice opportunities in the meetings, creating regular feedback loops in Panchayat about women's issues raised in Gram Sabha.

Conclusion:

Women's meaningful participation in Gram Sabha is essential for inclusive local governance and better development outcomes. While formal reservation in local bodies is an important institutional step, actual participation depends on a host of socioeconomic, cultural and institutional conditions. In Karveer taluka, the study aims to surface these conditions, provide an empirical snapshot

of women's participation, and suggest context-appropriate recommendations. Strengthening women's engagement can not only enhance accountability and responsiveness of local governance structures but also empower women socially and politically in their communities.

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