



Research Article

Influence of Caste, Education and Family on Women's Participation in Village Panchayats of Uttarakhand with special reference to Ukhimath and Raipur Block

Anjali Semwal*

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Shri Guru Ram Rai University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India

Article Information

Received: 21 September 2022

Revised version received: 25 January 2023

Accepted: 27 January 2023

Published: 31 January 2023

Cite this article as:

A. Semwal (2023) *Int. J. Soc. Sc. Manage.* 10(1): 5-9.

DOI: [10.3126/ijssm.v10i1.51962](https://doi.org/10.3126/ijssm.v10i1.51962)

*Corresponding author

Anjali Semwal,

Department of Political Science, Shri Guru Ram Rai University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India.

Email: anjalisemwal305@gmail.com

Peer reviewed under authority of IJSSM

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Keywords: Women Leadership; Social factors; Village Panchayat.

Abstract

Women's leadership and their effective participation is increasingly on the development agenda of governments. The gender mainstreaming and active involvement of women, who constitute almost 50 percent of population, is very crucial for the development of the rural areas. Women are still disadvantaged due to their limited access to land, credit, technology and resources. Rural women are economically backward. Poverty, illiteracy and caste are the factors affecting the social, economic and political development of woman.

Affirmative action to ensure women's participation in politics is an important step in democratising and engendering local governance. However, it has not been adequate to ensure women's leadership and their effective participation in local governance, as elected women representatives. At the institutional level, the capacity of local governance structures to implement reforms, institutionalize accountability systems, decentralise functions and facilitate women's active engagement plays a role in determining whether women are able to emerge as political actors. Social barriers include lack of education, lack of respect for women in PRIs, physical violence against women in public and domestic spheres and oppressive patriarchal and caste structures. In this paper effort has been made to analyse and understand influence of some of social factors, like caste, education and family on women's participation in village panchayat of Uttarakhand.

Introduction

Caste is a dominant factor in Indian society, especially in electoral politics. They both influence each other. Caste influences voting behavior. In the selection of candidate for contesting election caste is an important factor. While formulating any election strategy, program or policy, political parties always keep caste factor in their minds. The decision to implement Mandal Commission's recommendation for reservation for OBCs in jobs testifies

caste as a determinant of politics in India. So we can't study Indian political system without studying the influence of caste on it. Uttarakhand is not an exception to this fact. In Uttarakhand there are different castes, but Brahmin and Rajput are two dominant castes. According to Uttarakhand Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Rajputs constitute 35 percent of the total population and Brahmins 25 percent, together they constitute over 60 percent. As far

as the Dalit community is concerned, it constitutes almost 19 percent of total population (Mukherjee, 2022). SCs, STs and OBCs together constitute 23 percent of the total population in Uttarakhand. The dominance of caste in the socio-political landscape of Uttarakhand can't be overlooked. However, in terms of electoral politics, caste is not the sole deciding factor in Uttarakhand.

Education is another important factor that makes the women assertive. Female literacy has a significant influence in improving social, economic and political status of women. Illiteracy restricts once capacity to give thoughtful judgment on issues of importance (Makwana, 2009). Education or being literate will help women to understand the rules, regulations and fulfill the objectives of the institutions and help them to carries out their day-to-day functions (Vidya, 2007). Education of rural women is more important since they have become members of local government. Education will help them in proper participation in democratic decentralization process. Apart from providing facilities for education, training is another important way to enhance their skills, thinking ability, self-confidence and participation in decision making process.

Most important factor, which generally influences women's participation in politics, is family. A large number of women elected to local bodies are influenced by their husbands or male members of their families (Pathak, 2016). Family responsibilities and constraints on their mobility prevent women who are elected to the panchayats from attending meetings and training programmes. Those who attended are inhibited from expressing themselves. Some of these women are backed by men who form the real power behind the scenes. Constraints on women within the private domain have a direct impact on their capacity for public engagements (Buch, 2000).

The reproductive aspect of the sexual division of labour, including maintenance of a household, birthing and caring for children, care for older kin and other temporary or permanent familial dependents, as well as working in the fields or engaging in other income-generating activity that benefits the family, have been noted as a key obstacle to political or other organizational engagement (Perumal, 2009). This focus on domestication and a domesticated morality also means that women feel pressured to eschew any knowledge of outside matters, including politics. Prevailing traditional attitudes among both women and men elected leaders regarding domestic violence contribute to it being perceived as outside realm of public and political dialogue. Still, there is committed space and ownership for the discussions on these issues, as a small proportion of elected representatives raise these issues within meetings (Thapliyal, 2017).

Materials and Methods

Objective of Study

Keeping in view the following objective, the study is undertaken: To highlight the three main factors- Caste, Education and Family, which support or restrict women participation in Village Panchayats.

Hypothesis

The information collected on the basis of preliminary survey helped to abstract following hypothesis: Women are divided among different economic class, caste, community groups and educational levels. They need to break barriers of inequality and powerlessness for participatory development at grass-root levels, state and national levels.

Study Area

At present, Uttarakhand has thirteen districts with 95 Development Blocks, out of which two blocks have been selected for the present study- the block Ukhimath and the block Raipur. These two blocks have different political, social, economic, cultural and geographical background which represents hill and plain area of state. From both blocks 29 Village Panchayats are selected for study (Table 1).

Table 1: Selected Gram Panchayats for study

Ukhimath Block	Raipur Block
1. Sari,	1. Asthal,
2. Pathali,	2. Khairimansingh,
3. Bhainsari,	3. Thano,
4. Naala,	4. Paw Wala Soda,
5. Bhaitsem,	5. Dwara,
6. Rudrapur,	6. Dhanaula,
7. Dewar,	7. Sarauna,
8. Devshal,	8. Bhopalpani,
9. Badashu,	9. Dhaarkot,
10. Khumera,	10. Shera Gaon,
11. Triyuginarayan,	11. Kyara
12. Khadiya,	
13. Maikhanda,	
14. Byung,	
15. Andrawadi,	
16. Dewali Bhanigram,	
17. Lwani,	
18. Salya	

Sampling

The purposive sampling technique has been taken into consideration for this study, which has been conducted in two blocks. 29 elected women representatives of Village Panchayat and 80 members from women community, total 109 respondents have interviewed. For this purpose 50% of total Village Panchayats among them who are headed by women representatives, have been chosen.

In these 109 respondents 68 from Ukhimath and 41 from Raipur block of different 29 Village Panchayats have been interviewed (Table 2). In these 109 respondents from both the reserved and the general categories are taken. To ensure

the nature of purposive sampling, special attention is given to wide representation of women with variables like age, caste, education, income, family background and political participation etc. Thus, the sample may constitute from varied socio-economic and political background.

Table 2: Classification of respondents in different groups

Sr. No.	Block	Elected Women Representatives	Member of Women Community	Grand Total
1	Ukhimath	18	50	68
2	Raipur	11	30	41
	Total	29	80	109

Data Collection

Data has been collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary data for this paper is collected through questionnaires. The field study was conducted through the methods of questionnaire cum- interview schedule, discussions, and observations. Questionnaire, Interview, Discussion and Observation were the main tools for primary data collection.

The secondary data was collected from published and unpublished sources. The various published documents with regard to influence of caste, education and family on women participation in politics especially in grassroot level politics constitute the main sources of secondary data. It includes various books, articles, reports, pervious research, websites etc. The various articles related to the subject in different journals, magazines and newspaper were the important sources of secondary data.

Tools of Data

For this paper the processing of data and the preparation of the tables for analysis and interpretation has been done manually. For data analysis; description, Statistics, tabulation, frequency, correlation etc is done. The master charts are prepared manually. The percentage method is applied to analyse the data.

Results and Discussion

Views of Respondents about influence of Caste on Women’s participation in Village Panchayat

Collected data revealed that out of total 29 respondents from Elected Women Representatives, zero (0) percent respondents expressed their views about caste; they said caste don’t influence women’s representation in Village Panchayat. They themselves don’t elect their representative on the basis of caste. On the other hand, out of 80 respondents from women community only 15 women agreed that caste plays an important role in choosing leaders, which constitutes 18.75 percent of total sample (Fig. 1).

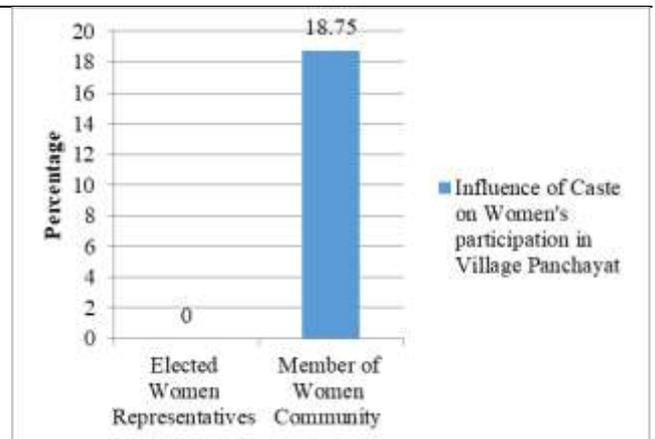


Fig. 1: Respondents views regarding influence of Caste (In %age)

Above mentioned data reveals that in contemporary rural Uttarakhand caste is not important factor to choose suitable candidate and its dominance in local politics gradually decreasing.

Views of Respondents about influence of Education on Women’s participation in Village Panchayat

In response to influence of education on Women’s representation in Village Panchayat out of 29 Elected Women Representatives only 6 respondents, which is 20.68 percent respondents had the opinion that educational qualification influence women’s representation. Out of total 80 respondents from women community 70 respondents (87.5 percent) said that they get influenced by educational qualification of candidates (Fig. 2).

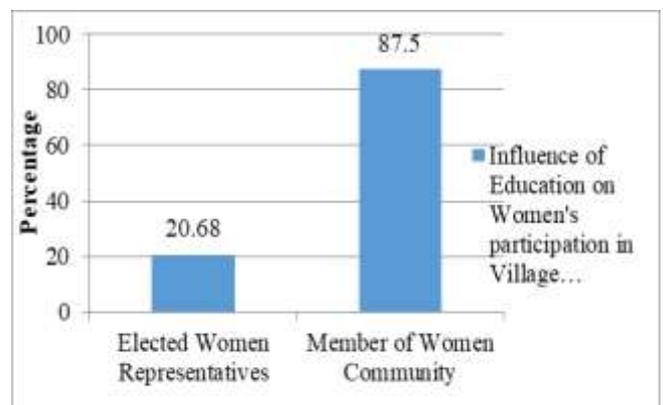


Fig. 2: Respondents views regarding influence of Education (In %age)

With the help of data, it can be said that the candidate himself and his/her educational qualification should be better.

Views of Respondents about influence of Family on Women’s participation in Village Panchayat

Out of total 29 respondents from elected women representatives 15 (51.72 percent) respondents accepted their family’s influence on their participation in Village Panchayat. While 28 respondents (35 percent) from women community had this opinion that family influences women’s

participation in Village Panchayat (Fig. 3).

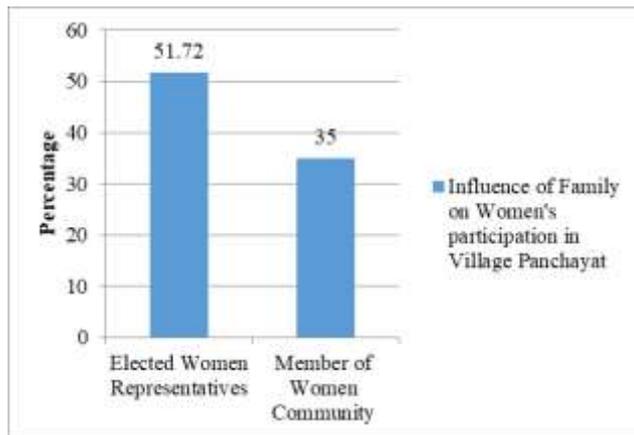


Fig. 3: Respondents views regarding influence of Family (In %age)

It is evident from above analysis that family's and men's attitude towards women's entry into politics has begun to change from that of rejection to limited encouragement and in some cases even to active encouragement.

Conclusion

This study reveals variation on the question of influence of caste in women's participation in politics. Most of elected women representatives believed that caste don't influence their votes. While some members of women community said that caste plays important role in choosing a leader. Though dominance of caste in Panchayat slowly decreasing. But castes are still dominating the political scene of State Assembly and Lok Sabha elections in both the blocks. It was observed that the women of higher castes, especially from influential families captured powers in different moulds in comparison to those of lower castes in both the blocks. This decreased to a certain extent the overall participation of women in the rural areas. The other reason for higher caste monopoly in the power structure was education. It was found that the political participation of women was not possible unless and until there was their economic empowerment.

Illiteracy is one of the major hurdles in participation of the women in the democratic politics of the grassroots institutions. However, increasing way literacy rate in Uttarakhand in general has contributed in a big way to the participation of women in grassroots institutions. Illiterate women hesitate in the process of participation. It was observed that increase in female literacy rate would surely make an enhancement of women's participation in grassroots institutions. It is clear that the majority of the respondents opined that the women without education face more difficulties and they are not able to discharge or perform their duties and responsibilities in a better way in these grass root level institutions.

It is also observed that women are being dominated by the male members in the decision making process in PRIs. It is also seen that there is male's interference in the day to day activities of women while functioning at Panchayat level. The newly emerged women's leadership in the rural areas of Ukhimath was not well educated, aware and trained in comparison to elected women representatives of Raipur Block. It is because of the surrounding and locality of both the Blocks. The elected women representatives were more of a rubber stamp of the male members and had to do what they told them to do. So it can be said that the concept of 'Pradhan Pati' is still exist in rural areas of Ukhimath Block.

Recommendations

- Education, awareness and training program should be provided to women. Including legal and political education and training, to develop the leadership potential of women. If the woman representative cannot go to training centre far from her village, training should be given in her village.
- Even today not only people in rural areas but also in urban areas think that politics is not suitable and safe for women. This mindset need to be change. Specially on the local level because women better knows the need of family as well as society. Family can help in her household activities so that woman representative fulfills her duty without any extra workload.
- Women need to break the barriers of powerlessness and shyness and should strive to enter into important organizational positions of political parties, pressure groups and other organizations. In the midst of difficult situation, women can march ahead with self-determination and spirit of not giving up. For these women and men both must have the ability to tolerate.
- To ensure women's participation in Panchayats, equal access to resources is essential. It will make women financially self-dependence.
- There is a need to amend Indian constitution to give reservation for women in Parliament and state assembly elections. So women could see growth in this field too. For this all the women organizations and voters should come on a common platform to raise their voice collectively.

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