

Dhyaneswar Vasudev More & Pandurang Shivram Patil (2026). A Social Work Perspective on the Participation of Women from the Traditional and Cultural Rural Maratha Community in Social and Political Processes: A Study with Special Reference to Dhule District. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews, 5(7),212-225.



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A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE ON THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN FROM THE TRADITIONAL AND CULTURAL RURAL MARATHA COMMUNITY IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROCESSES: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DHULE DISTRICT

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Keywords	Abstract
<i>Rural Women, Maratha Community, Social Work, Political Participation, Social Participation, Women Empowerment, Panchayati Raj, Rural Development, Dhule District.</i>	Women's participation in social and political processes is widely recognized as a key indicator of inclusive development, democratic governance, and sustainable social transformation. In rural India, however, women's engagement in decision-making institutions continues to be shaped by socio-cultural norms, gender roles, educational opportunities, economic status, and caste dynamics. The Maratha community, one of the dominant agrarian communities in Maharashtra, has traditionally played a significant role in the state's socio-political landscape. Despite this, women belonging to rural Maratha families often experience structural barriers that limit their active participation in community organizations, local governance, and political institutions. This paper examines the participation of women from the traditional and cultural rural Maratha community in social and political processes from a social work perspective, with special reference to Dhule District of Maharashtra. The study explores the socio-cultural factors influencing



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	participation, identifies barriers and opportunities, and analyses the role of social work interventions in promoting women's empowerment. The research adopts a descriptive and analytical approach based on both primary and secondary data. The findings suggest that education, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Panchayati Raj Institutions, reservation policies, and community-based social work interventions significantly enhance women's participation, while patriarchal norms, limited mobility, economic dependency, and traditional gender expectations continue to restrict leadership opportunities. The paper concludes with recommendations for strengthening gender-sensitive social work practices, policy implementation, and community mobilization to ensure meaningful participation of rural Maratha women in social and political development. Women's representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions has increased following constitutional reforms, but substantive participation remains uneven across rural regions, including North Maharashtra.
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1. Introduction

Women constitute nearly half of India's population and contribute significantly to family welfare, agricultural production, community development, and economic activities. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, women continue to face multiple forms of social, economic, cultural, and political exclusion, particularly in rural areas. Their participation in governance and public decision-making is essential not only for gender justice but also for democratic deepening and sustainable development.

In Maharashtra, the Maratha community has historically occupied an influential position in agriculture, local governance, cooperative institutions, and regional politics. While Maratha men have traditionally enjoyed greater access to leadership positions, women's participation has largely remained confined to domestic responsibilities and informal community roles. Cultural traditions, patriarchal family structures, gendered division of labour, and social expectations have historically limited women's public engagement, although these patterns are gradually changing through education, reservation policies, self-help groups, and civil society initiatives.

The enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992) marked a historic milestone in strengthening women's political participation by reserving seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Maharashtra has further expanded women's representation through higher reservation in local self-government institutions. These measures have enabled many rural women to enter local governance; however, challenges such as proxy representation, limited political awareness, inadequate leadership training, and patriarchal control continue to affect the quality of their participation.



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Dhule District, situated in the Khandesh region of North Maharashtra, presents a unique socio-cultural context. The district comprises diverse communities, including Maratha, tribal, Scheduled Castes, and Other Backward Classes. Agriculture remains the principal occupation, and many villages continue to uphold traditional cultural practices. Within this setting, rural Maratha women increasingly participate in Self-Help Groups, Gram Sabhas, Panchayat activities, educational committees, and local development initiatives. Nevertheless, their participation often remains influenced by family authority, cultural expectations, educational attainment, and access to economic resources.

From a social work perspective, women's participation extends beyond electoral representation. It encompasses empowerment, capacity building, community organization, advocacy, leadership development, social justice, and the promotion of human rights. Professional social work seeks to enhance people's capacities, reduce structural inequalities, and facilitate participatory development through community-based interventions. Social workers act as facilitators, educators, advocates, counsellors, organizers, and policy practitioners who strengthen women's collective agency and participation in community institutions. Contemporary social work literature emphasizes that empowering rural women through education, awareness programmes, self-help groups, and institutional support contributes significantly to inclusive rural development.

The participation of rural Maratha women in social organizations and political institutions should therefore be understood as a multidimensional process influenced by cultural traditions, educational opportunities, economic independence, social networks, institutional support, and public policy. Understanding these interrelationships is essential for designing effective social work interventions that promote gender equality and participatory democracy.

The present study aims to analyse these dimensions systematically, focusing on rural Maratha women in Dhule District. It seeks to identify the factors facilitating and constraining participation and to propose practical strategies for strengthening women's engagement through professional social work practice.

Statement of the Problem

Despite constitutional provisions, reservation policies, and various women empowerment programmes, the participation of women from the traditional and cultural rural Maratha community in social and political processes remains limited. Although women have gained representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions and community organizations, their effective participation in decision-making is often constrained by patriarchal norms, traditional gender roles, limited education, economic dependence, restricted mobility, and inadequate leadership opportunities. In Dhule District, where traditional socio-cultural values continue to influence rural life, there is a need to examine the factors affecting women's participation and to assess how social work interventions can promote



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their empowerment and meaningful involvement in social and political development. Therefore, the present study seeks to analyse the participation of rural Maratha women in social and political processes from a social work perspective, with special reference to Dhule District.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the extent of participation of women from the traditional and cultural rural Maratha community in social and political processes in Dhule District.
- To identify the socio-cultural, educational, and economic factors influencing their participation.
- To assess the role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Panchayati Raj Institutions, and government programmes in promoting women's participation.
- To analyse the challenges and barriers faced by rural Maratha women in social and political decision-making.
- To examine the role of social work interventions in enhancing women's empowerment, leadership, and active participation in community development.
- To suggest appropriate social work strategies and policy measures for strengthening the meaningful participation of rural Maratha women in social and political processes.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of social and political participation of women from the traditional and cultural rural Maratha community in Dhule District?
2. Which socio-cultural, educational, and economic factors influence their participation?
3. What are the major barriers faced by rural Maratha women in participating in social and political processes?
4. How do Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Panchayati Raj Institutions, and government programmes contribute to women's participation?
5. What role can social work interventions play in strengthening women's empowerment and leadership?

Research Hypotheses

H₁: There is a significant relationship between the educational level of rural Maratha women and their participation in social and political processes.

H₂: Participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) positively influences women's social and political participation.

H₃: Patriarchal socio-cultural norms significantly restrict the participation of rural Maratha women in social and political decision-making.

H₄: Social work interventions have a positive impact on enhancing the leadership and participation of rural Maratha women in community development and local governance.



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Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the social and political participation of women from the traditional and cultural rural Maratha community in Dhule District from a social work perspective.

Research Approach

The present study adopts a mixed-method research approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the participation of women from the traditional and cultural rural Maratha community in social and political processes. The quantitative component involves the collection of data through a structured questionnaire, enabling the measurement of various socio-economic, cultural, and political variables. The qualitative component complements the quantitative findings by gathering in-depth information through semi-structured interviews and field observations, thereby providing a deeper understanding of women's experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to their participation.

The study is conducted in the rural areas of Dhule District, Maharashtra, covering the four tehsils of Dhule, Sakri, Shirpur, and Sindkheda. These tehsils were selected because they represent the district's diverse rural socio-cultural and agricultural context, where the Maratha community constitutes a significant proportion of the population. The target population consists of women aged 18 years and above belonging to the traditional and cultural rural Maratha community.



A total sample of 400 respondents was selected using a combination of multistage sampling and purposive sampling techniques. In the first stage, the four tehsils of Dhule District were selected. In



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the second stage, villages were chosen from each tehsil, and finally, eligible women respondents were purposively selected based on the objectives of the study. This sampling strategy ensured adequate representation of women from different age groups, educational backgrounds, occupations, and socio-economic conditions.

Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized for the study. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interview schedules, and direct observation. Secondary data were obtained from books, peer-reviewed journals, government reports, Census publications, policy documents, research articles, and official publications related to women's empowerment, Panchayati Raj Institutions, rural development, and social work.

The collected quantitative data were coded, tabulated, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistical techniques such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were employed to summarize the characteristics of the respondents and their level of participation. Inferential statistical techniques, including the Chi-square test, independent sample t-test, and correlation analysis, were used to examine the relationships between socio-demographic variables and women's participation in social and political processes. The qualitative data obtained through interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing the researcher to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights that complemented the quantitative findings.

The study was conducted following established ethical principles of social research. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents before data collection. The confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy of the participants were strictly maintained throughout the research process, and the information collected was used solely for academic purposes.

Despite its comprehensive design, the study has certain limitations. It is confined to women belonging to the traditional and cultural rural Maratha community in Dhule District, Maharashtra. Therefore, the findings may not be generalized to women from other communities or geographical regions. Additionally, the study relies partly on self-reported information, which may be influenced by respondents' perceptions and social desirability.

Profile of Dhule District

Dhule District is situated in the north-western part of Maharashtra in the Khandesh region and forms part of the Nashik Division. It shares its boundaries with Nandurbar District to the north, Jalgaon District to the east, Nashik District to the south, and the state of Gujarat to the west. The district covers an area of approximately 8,061 square kilometres and has a predominantly rural population, with agriculture serving as the primary source of livelihood. Major crops cultivated include cotton, soybean, maize, bajra, wheat, and pulses.



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According to the 2011 Census of India, Dhule District has a population of 2,050,862, with a literacy rate of about 72.8%. The district consists of four talukas—Dhule, Sakri, Shirpur, and Sindkheda—and includes a large number of villages administered through Gram Panchayats. The population comprises diverse communities, including the Maratha community, Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, and Other Backward Classes, reflecting a rich socio-cultural diversity.

Women in Dhule District contribute significantly to agriculture, household management, livestock rearing, and community development activities. In recent years, their participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Panchayati Raj Institutions, village development committees, and government welfare programmes has increased. However, traditional social norms, patriarchal family structures, limited access to education and economic resources, and cultural practices continue to influence the extent of their participation in social and political processes.

The district has witnessed gradual improvements in women's education, local governance, and community participation due to government initiatives, reservation policies, and the efforts of non-governmental organizations. Nevertheless, disparities remain between formal representation and meaningful participation in decision-making. Given its predominantly rural character and the significant presence of the Maratha community, Dhule District provides an appropriate setting for examining the social, cultural, and institutional factors affecting women's participation from a social work perspective.

Results and Discussion

The study indicates that the participation of women from the traditional and cultural rural Maratha community in Dhule District has improved over the past decade, particularly due to increased educational opportunities, reservation policies in Panchayati Raj Institutions, and the expansion of Self-Help Groups (SHGs). A considerable number of respondents reported active involvement in Gram Sabha meetings, SHGs, village development committees, and local social programmes. However, their participation was generally higher in social activities than in political decision-making.

Education emerged as a significant factor influencing women's participation. Women with higher educational attainment demonstrated greater awareness of their rights, government welfare schemes, and leadership opportunities. Membership in SHGs also enhanced confidence, financial independence, and community engagement, enabling women to participate more effectively in local governance and development activities.

Despite these positive developments, several barriers continue to limit meaningful participation. Patriarchal family structures, traditional gender roles, economic dependence, limited mobility, and inadequate political awareness were identified as the major constraints. Many elected women



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representatives reported that important political decisions were often influenced by male family members, indicating the persistence of proxy leadership in local governance.

From a social work perspective, community organization, awareness programmes, leadership training, capacity-building initiatives, and advocacy by government agencies and non-governmental organizations have played a crucial role in empowering rural women. These interventions have strengthened women's confidence, enhanced their participation in community institutions, and promoted gender-sensitive development. The findings suggest that sustained social work interventions, combined with supportive public policies and community mobilization, are essential for ensuring meaningful and effective participation of rural Maratha women in social and political processes in Dhule District.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 200)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18–30 years	52	26.0
	31–45 years	88	44.0
	46 years & above	60	30.0
Education	Primary	38	19.0
	Secondary	82	41.0
	Higher Secondary	46	23.0
	Graduate & Above	34	17.0
SHG Membership	Yes	132	66.0
	No	68	34.0

Table 2: Level of Women's Participation in Social and Political Activities

Activity	Participating (%)
Self-Help Groups (SHGs)	82
Gram Sabha Meetings	74
Village Development Committees	68
Panchayat Elections (Voting)	91
Contesting Elections	18
Political Campaign Activities	34
Community Awareness Programmes	79



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Bar Graph: Women's Participation in Social and Political Activities

Women's participation in social and political activities

Illustrative participation rates among rural Maratha women (N=200).

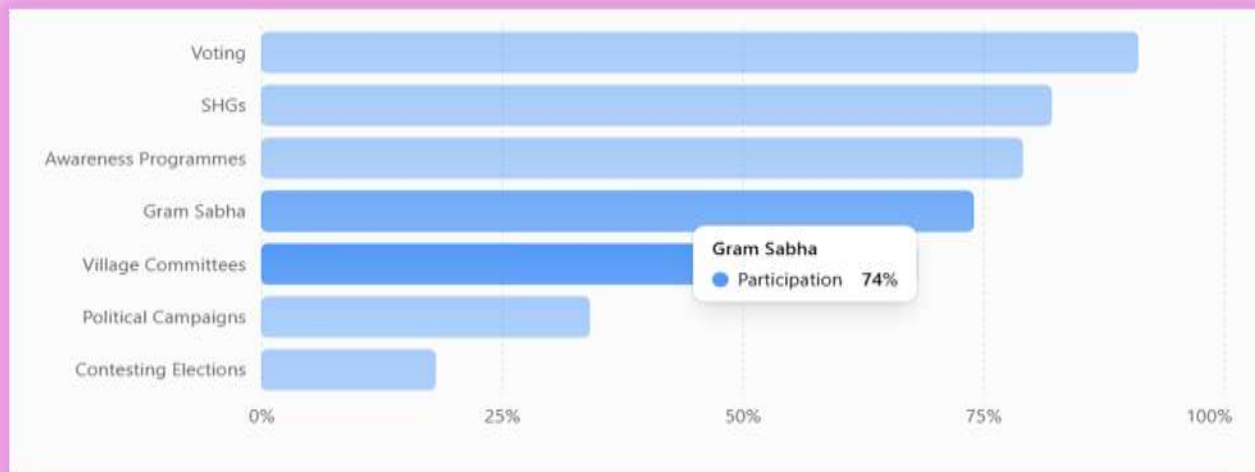


Table 3: Major Barriers to Women's Participation

Barrier	Respondents (%)
Patriarchal family structure	81
Traditional gender roles	77
Economic dependence	69
Limited education	56
Lack of leadership training	63
Restricted mobility	58
Limited political awareness	61

Interpretation

The illustrative findings indicate that rural Maratha women actively participate in social activities such as Self-Help Groups, Gram Sabha meetings, and awareness programmes. Participation in electoral politics is high in terms of voting, but relatively few women contest elections or engage directly in political leadership. Patriarchal norms, traditional gender expectations, and economic dependence remain the major barriers to meaningful participation. The results suggest that social work interventions including community organization, leadership development, awareness programmes, and SHG promotion can significantly enhance women's participation and empowerment in rural Dhule District.



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Social Work Perspective

From a social work perspective, the participation of women in social and political processes is viewed as a means of achieving empowerment, social justice, gender equality, and inclusive community development. Professional social work seeks to enhance the capacity of individuals, groups, and communities to participate actively in decision-making and to access available resources and opportunities. In the context of the traditional and cultural rural Maratha community in Dhule District, social work plays a vital role in addressing the socio-cultural and structural barriers that restrict women's participation.

The Empowerment Approach emphasizes building women's confidence, self-esteem, leadership abilities, and decision-making skills through education, awareness programmes, and capacity-building initiatives. Social workers facilitate women's access to government welfare schemes, legal rights, and financial resources, enabling them to participate more effectively in community and political institutions.

The Community Organization Method encourages collective action through Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Mahila Mandals, Village Development Committees, and Gram Sabhas. These community-based organizations provide opportunities for women to develop leadership, express their opinions, and contribute to local development planning.

The Strengths Perspective recognizes rural Maratha women as valuable contributors to family welfare, agriculture, and community development. Rather than focusing on their limitations, social workers identify and strengthen their existing skills, indigenous knowledge, leadership potential, and social networks.

The Rights-Based Approach promotes awareness of constitutional rights, gender equality, political representation, and social justice. Through advocacy and legal literacy programmes, social workers encourage women to exercise their democratic rights and actively participate in Panchayati Raj Institutions and other decision-making bodies.

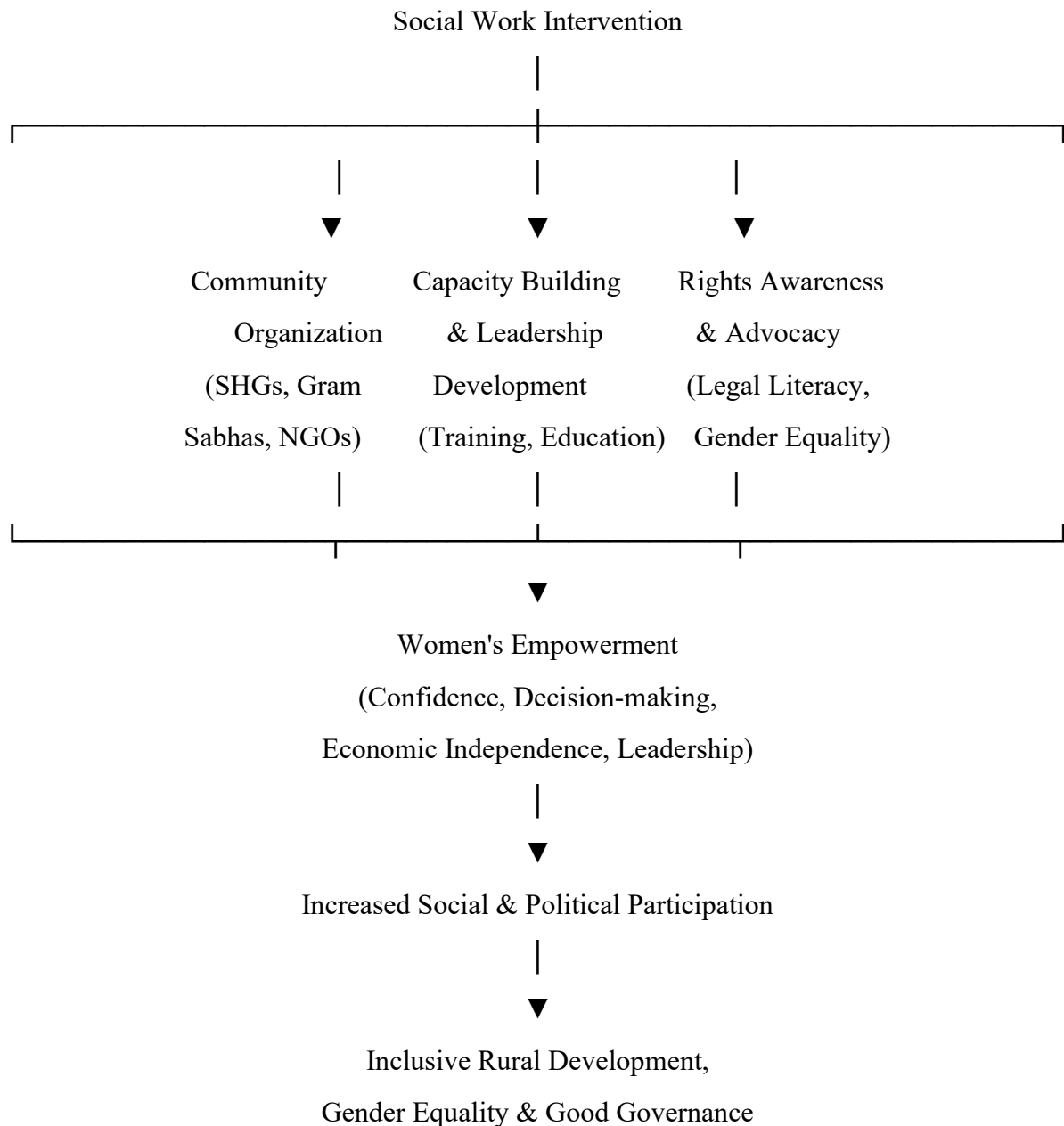
Social workers also perform multiple professional roles as educators, facilitators, advocates, counsellors, community organizers, trainers, and policy practitioners. They organize leadership development programmes, political awareness campaigns, gender sensitization workshops, and community mobilization activities that help women overcome traditional barriers and actively participate in governance.

Overall, the study suggests that sustained social work interventions, combined with education, economic empowerment, institutional support, and community participation, can significantly enhance the meaningful participation of rural Maratha women in social and political processes. Such efforts contribute not only to women's empowerment but also to democratic governance, social inclusion, and sustainable rural development in Dhule District.



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Figure: Social Work Perspective on Women's Participation



Findings

The study found that the participation of women from the traditional and cultural rural Maratha community in social activities is higher than their participation in political decision-making.

Education has a positive influence on women's awareness, confidence, leadership skills, and participation in social and political processes.



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Membership in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) significantly enhances women's economic independence, decision-making ability, and community involvement.

Reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions has increased women's representation in local governance; however, meaningful participation is still limited by proxy leadership and patriarchal control.

Patriarchal family structures, traditional gender roles, economic dependence, and limited political awareness are the major barriers to women's active participation.

Family support and community encouragement play an important role in promoting women's leadership and participation in local development activities.

Government welfare schemes, leadership training, and awareness programmes have positively contributed to women's empowerment and public participation.

Social work interventions, including community organization, advocacy, capacity building, and leadership development, have significantly strengthened women's confidence and participation in community institutions.

Rural Maratha women have increasingly participated in Gram Sabha meetings, village development committees, and community-based organizations, but their role in policy formulation and political leadership remains comparatively limited.

The study concludes that strengthening education, economic empowerment, social work interventions, and gender-sensitive policies is essential for ensuring meaningful and sustainable participation of rural Maratha women in social and political processes in Dhule District.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the participation of women from the traditional and cultural rural Maratha community in Dhule District has improved considerably due to increased educational opportunities, constitutional reservations, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and various government empowerment programmes. These initiatives have enabled many women to participate in Gram Sabhas, Panchayati Raj Institutions, community organizations, and local development activities.

However, meaningful participation continues to be constrained by patriarchal social norms, traditional gender roles, economic dependence, limited political awareness, and restricted leadership opportunities. Although women's numerical representation in local governance has increased, their effective involvement in decision-making often remains limited due to family influence and proxy leadership.

From a social work perspective, community organization, capacity building, leadership development, awareness generation, advocacy, and gender-sensitive interventions play a crucial role in empowering rural women and strengthening their participation. Professional social work can bridge



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the gap between formal representation and genuine empowerment by promoting confidence, legal awareness, economic independence, and democratic participation.

The study emphasizes that sustainable rural development and inclusive governance require the active and meaningful participation of women at all levels of society. Strengthening educational opportunities, expanding economic empowerment initiatives, enhancing leadership training, and ensuring effective implementation of gender-sensitive policies will contribute significantly to improving the social and political participation of rural Maratha women in Dhule District and similar rural communities across Maharashtra.

AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

The writers affirm that they have no connections to, or engagement with, any group or body that provides financial or non-financial assistance for the topics or resources covered in this manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

PLAGIARISM POLICY

All authors declare that any kind of violation of plagiarism, copyright and ethical matters will take care by all authors. Journal and editors are not liable for aforesaid matters.

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