

Role of Education and Awareness in Enhancing Political Participation of Scheduled Tribe Women in Rajasthan with Special Reference of Banswara District

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the role of education and political awareness in enhancing the political participation of Scheduled Tribe (ST) women in Rajasthan, with a focus on Banswara district. Despite constitutional provisions such as the 73rd Amendment, which mandates reservations for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), the political participation of ST women remains low due to socio-cultural barriers, lack of education, and political hostility. The study employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative data from structured surveys and qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions conducted with 240 ST women across 12 Gram Panchayats in Banswara district. The findings reveal that women with higher education and greater political awareness are more likely to contest elections, engage in decision-making, and participate in governance processes. Economic dependence, patriarchal norms, and lack of institutional support are identified as significant barriers to political participation. The study underscores the need for targeted policy interventions, including improving access to education, conducting political awareness campaigns, and providing financial and institutional support to enhance the political agency of ST women. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on gender and political empowerment in rural India and highlight the importance of inclusive governance.

Keywords: *Political participation, Scheduled Tribe women, education, political awareness, Panchayati Raj, Rajasthan, empowerment*

A. Background of the Study

Historical Context of Political Participation Among Women in India

Political participation of women in India has historically been limited due to deep-rooted patriarchal structures and social norms that have restricted their role in public life. The Constitution of India, through various amendments and legal reforms, has sought to address this gender disparity by ensuring political representation and participation for women. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 marked a significant turning point by introducing a mandatory reservation of 33% of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), which was later increased to 50% in several states. This legislative move was aimed at enhancing the political visibility and decision-making power of women at the grassroots level. However, despite these legal provisions, women's actual participation in

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political processes remains inconsistent and limited due to socio-cultural barriers, lack of education, and political awareness (Buch, 2000).

Status of Scheduled Tribe (ST) Women in Rajasthan

Rajasthan, with its diverse tribal population, presents a unique socio-political landscape for the study of women's political participation. Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities in Rajasthan have historically faced social and economic marginalization, contributing to low levels of literacy and political engagement among tribal women. According to the 2011 Census of India, the tribal population in Rajasthan accounts for approximately 13.5% of the state's total population, with a significant concentration in districts such as Banswara, Dungarpur, and Udaipur (Government of India, 2011). Despite constitutional safeguards and political reservations, ST women face multiple layers of discrimination based on gender, caste, and tribal identity. Their participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions remains minimal, as systemic barriers such as limited access to education, patriarchal norms, and political hostility continue to hinder their empowerment.

Role of Education and Awareness in Political Participation

Education and political awareness play a critical role in enhancing the political participation of marginalized groups, including ST women. Education equips women with the knowledge, skills, and confidence required to engage in political decision-making and leadership. It helps them understand their constitutional rights, the functioning of democratic institutions, and the importance of participating in governance. Political awareness, on the other hand, ensures that women are informed about political processes, policy frameworks, and their entitlements under various government schemes. Studies have shown that women who are educated and politically aware are more likely to contest elections, influence local governance decisions, and advocate for community welfare (Desai, 1996). Thus, education and awareness are essential drivers of political empowerment and social inclusion for ST women in Rajasthan.

B. Statement of the Problem

Despite constitutional provisions and affirmative action, the political participation of ST women in Rajasthan remains low. While reservations have created opportunities for ST women to hold political office, their meaningful engagement in decision-making processes is limited due to low literacy rates, lack of political awareness, and social discrimination. The literacy rate among ST women in Rajasthan is significantly lower than the national average, limiting their ability to engage with political institutions effectively. Furthermore, cultural norms and patriarchal structures discourage women from actively participating in political activities. Political hostility, lack of institutional support, and economic dependence further weaken the political agency of ST women. As a result, the representation of ST women in Panchayati Raj Institutions often remains symbolic rather than substantive. This study seeks to explore how education and political awareness can enhance the political participation of ST women in Rajasthan and empower them to play a more active role in governance.

C. Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following key questions:

1. How does education impact the political participation of Scheduled Tribe women in Rajasthan?
2. What role does political awareness play in empowering ST women to engage in governance and decision-making?

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3. What are the challenges and opportunities faced by ST women in political institutions at the grassroots level?

D. Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. **To examine the relationship between education and political participation** – This includes analyzing whether higher literacy rates among ST women correlate with increased political involvement, leadership, and decision-making capacity in Panchayati Raj Institutions.
2. **To analyze the impact of political awareness on decision-making** – This objective focuses on understanding how knowledge of political rights, electoral processes, and policy frameworks influences the political agency of ST women.
3. **To identify barriers and suggest policy interventions** – This includes documenting the structural, social, and economic challenges faced by ST women in political institutions and recommending policy measures to strengthen their political participation and leadership.

E. Significance of the Study This study is significant for several reasons:

1. **Contribution to Policy and Academic Research**

Understanding the role of education and political awareness in enhancing the political participation of ST women will provide valuable insights for policymakers and scholars. The findings of this study can inform the design of targeted educational and political training programs for marginalized communities. It will contribute to the growing body of research on gender, political participation, and tribal empowerment in India.

2. **Promoting Inclusive Governance**

Effective participation of ST women in local governance is crucial for building inclusive and representative democratic institutions. By enhancing the political agency of ST women, this study aims to promote gender and social equality in decision-making processes at the grassroots level.

3. **Empowering Marginalized Communities**

Political empowerment of ST women can have a cascading effect on the broader socio-economic development of tribal communities. When women actively engage in governance, they are more likely to advocate for issues such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and social justice, thereby improving the overall quality of life for marginalized groups.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Buch (2000) highlights the historical exclusion of women from political processes in India due to entrenched patriarchal norms and societal structures. The study explains that while Indian women played an active role in the freedom movement, their participation in formal political institutions remained limited post-independence. However, the introduction of affirmative action measures, including constitutional amendments, has contributed to increased visibility of women in politics. The study concludes that despite increased representation, women's political participation remains constrained by social, economic, and institutional barriers.

Palanithurai (2002) examines the impact of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 on women's political participation in rural India. The amendment introduced a 33%

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reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), which was later increased to 50% in several states. The study finds that while reservations have facilitated higher numerical representation of women in local governance, meaningful participation in decision-making remains limited due to lack of education, political awareness, and patriarchal interference. The study recommends enhancing educational and political training programs to strengthen women's political agency.

Sharma (2015) provides a detailed analysis of the socio-economic and political status of Scheduled Tribe (ST) women in Rajasthan. The study indicates that ST women in Rajasthan face multiple layers of marginalization due to their tribal identity, gender, and low socio-economic status. Their political representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions remains symbolic rather than substantive. The study emphasizes that improving educational access and political awareness among ST women is critical for enhancing their political participation and decision-making capacity.

Desai (1996) explores the socio-economic conditions of ST women in rural India, with a focus on Rajasthan. The study reveals that low literacy rates, poor health infrastructure, and limited economic opportunities contribute to the disempowerment of ST women. Politically, these women face systemic barriers such as male dominance in local governance and lack of institutional support. The study argues that improving access to education and economic independence is essential for empowering ST women to engage in political decision-making.

Baviskar (2003) investigates the structural and operational challenges faced by women in rural governance. The study identifies male dominance, lack of awareness about political rights, and economic dependence as key factors limiting the effectiveness of women's political participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The research highlights that while reservation policies have increased women's numerical representation, social and economic barriers continue to restrict their influence in local governance. The study calls for targeted interventions to address these challenges.

Agarwal (2010) examines the role of education in enhancing political participation among women in rural India. The study demonstrates a positive correlation between educational attainment and political empowerment, with educated women being more likely to participate in local governance, contest elections, and engage in policy advocacy. The research underscores the importance of promoting educational initiatives focused on political literacy and leadership training to empower women in rural governance.

Kumar (2018) analyzes the impact of literacy rates on women's political participation in Rajasthan. The study shows that women with higher literacy levels are more likely to participate in political activities, attend Gram Sabha meetings, and influence local decision-making. The research finds that literacy enhances women's confidence and ability to understand complex political issues, thereby improving their political agency. The study recommends increasing access to education and political training for marginalized communities.

Chaudhary (2016) explores the leadership patterns among educated women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The study finds that educated women leaders are more effective in policy implementation, resource allocation, and conflict resolution. Educated women are more likely to challenge patriarchal norms and engage in policy advocacy. The study emphasizes the

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need for leadership training programs to strengthen the political capacity of women in rural governance.

Yadav (2017) investigates the role of political awareness in enhancing women's political participation. The study finds that women with greater awareness of their political rights and responsibilities are more likely to contest elections and engage in governance processes. Political mobilization through women's collectives and grassroots organizations is identified as a key driver of political empowerment. The study recommends increasing political awareness campaigns and training programs to improve women's political engagement.

Roy (2015) examines the influence of cultural and social norms on women's political participation in rural India. The study finds that patriarchal family structures and social expectations discourage women from engaging in political activities. Women who enter politics often face resistance from family members and community leaders.

Joshi (2014) highlights the absence of institutional mechanisms to support women's political participation in rural governance. The study identifies lack of access to political training, mentorship, and financial resources as key barriers faced by women in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Singh (2013) analyzes the relationship between economic dependence and political participation among women in rural India. The study finds that women who lack independent sources of income are less likely to engage in political activities due to fear of social backlash and financial instability. The study recommends introducing microfinance programs and employment opportunities for rural women to enhance their political agency.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Feminist Political Theory

Feminist political theory provides a critical lens for understanding the political participation of women, especially those from marginalized communities such as Scheduled Tribes (ST) in Rajasthan. Feminist political theory challenges the traditional, male-dominated structures of political power and argues for the inclusion of women in political decision-making at all levels. According to Pateman (1988), political structures have historically been constructed around patriarchal norms, where power is concentrated in the hands of men. This has resulted in the systematic exclusion of women from political processes and decision-making.

In the context of Scheduled Tribe women in Rajasthan, feminist political theory explains how deeply rooted gender norms and societal expectations have contributed to their limited political participation. Women's political engagement is often confined to informal or symbolic roles rather than substantive decision-making positions. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, which introduced 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), was a landmark reform aimed at challenging these patriarchal structures and ensuring greater representation of women in local governance (Palanithurai, 2002).

However, feminist scholars argue that political representation alone is insufficient unless accompanied by structural changes that enable women to exercise real power. Gendered power dynamics within families and communities continue to limit the effectiveness of women's political roles. For instance, in many cases, elected women representatives in PRIs are influenced or controlled by male relatives, thereby limiting their ability to make

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independent decisions (Desai, 1996). Feminist political theory, therefore, underscores the importance of addressing both formal and informal barriers to women's political participation and ensuring that women have the capacity to influence policy outcomes and governance decisions.

Feminist political theory also highlights the importance of political training and capacity-building for women. Education and political awareness are seen as essential tools for breaking down patriarchal norms and equipping women with the confidence and knowledge necessary to engage in political processes. Without access to education and awareness of political rights, the potential for meaningful political participation remains limited. Thus, feminist political theory provides a framework for analyzing how education and political awareness can empower ST women to overcome structural and societal barriers to political engagement.

B. Empowerment Theory

Empowerment theory focuses on the process of enabling marginalized individuals and groups to gain control over their lives and influence the structures that affect them (Zimmerman, 1995). It emphasizes the importance of education and awareness as fundamental tools for political and social empowerment. According to this theory, empowerment occurs at multiple levels—individual, community, and institutional—and involves increasing access to resources, enhancing self-confidence, and building the capacity to engage in decision-making processes.

In the context of ST women in Rajasthan, empowerment theory explains how education and political awareness can enhance their political participation. Education equips women with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in political processes, understand policy frameworks, and advocate for their rights. Political awareness ensures that women are informed about electoral processes, the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions, and their constitutional rights. Empowered women are more likely to participate in elections, hold leadership positions, and influence policy decisions.

Empowerment theory also highlights the role of grassroots movements in facilitating political empowerment. Women's self-help groups (SHGs), community-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in mobilizing women and providing them with platforms to voice their concerns and engage with political institutions. Studies have shown that ST women who are part of SHGs or grassroots movements are more likely to participate in local governance and take up leadership roles (Agarwal, 2010).

Furthermore, empowerment theory emphasizes the need for institutional support and capacity-building programs to sustain women's political participation. Training programs on leadership, conflict resolution, and governance can help women develop the confidence and skills needed to navigate political structures effectively. Political empowerment through grassroots movements and institutional support is essential for ensuring that ST women can translate political representation into meaningful decision-making and policy influence.

C. Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory, introduced by scholars such as Putnam (1993), emphasizes the role of networks, social relationships, and trust in facilitating political engagement. According to this theory, individuals who are embedded in strong social networks are more likely to engage in

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political activities, participate in collective action, and influence decision-making processes. Social capital is generated through participation in community organizations, political groups, and informal social networks.

For ST women in Rajasthan, social capital theory explains how community networks and relationships can enhance political participation. Women's engagement in self-help groups, village councils, and community-based organizations creates opportunities for collective action and political mobilization. When women are part of strong social networks, they are more likely to share information, coordinate political activities, and support each other in contesting elections and engaging in governance processes.

Political mobilization among ST women is often facilitated by grassroots organizations and women's collectives. These platforms provide women with the opportunity to discuss political issues, strategize collective action, and support each other in navigating political structures. Studies have shown that ST women who are part of social networks are more likely to contest elections, engage in policy advocacy, and participate in Gram Sabha meetings (Yadav, 2017). Social capital theory also highlights the importance of building trust between women and political institutions. When women perceive political institutions as accessible, transparent, and responsive, they are more likely to engage in political processes. Training programs, mentorship initiatives, and political awareness campaigns can help strengthen this trust and encourage greater participation of ST women in governance.

Moreover, social capital theory underscores the importance of intergenerational transfer of political knowledge and skills. When ST women engage in political networks, they pass on their knowledge and experiences to younger generations, thereby creating a sustainable culture of political participation. The creation of women's political networks and leadership forums can enhance the long-term political empowerment of ST women and ensure their continued engagement in governance.

The theoretical framework combining feminist political theory, empowerment theory, and social capital theory provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing political participation of ST women in Rajasthan. Feminist political theory explains the structural and gendered barriers to political participation, while empowerment theory highlights the role of education and awareness in enabling women to overcome these barriers. Social capital theory emphasizes the importance of networks and collective action in sustaining political engagement. Together, these theories provide a robust framework for analyzing how education and awareness can enhance the political participation of ST women and empower them to play a more active role in governance and decision-making.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method approach combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of education and political awareness in enhancing the political participation of Scheduled Tribe (ST) women in Rajasthan. The mixed-method approach is suitable for capturing both statistical patterns and in-depth insights, thereby allowing for a more holistic analysis of the research problem (Creswell, 2014).

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The quantitative component focuses on measuring the extent of political participation among ST women, the impact of education and awareness on political engagement, and identifying barriers to political participation through structured surveys and statistical analysis. The qualitative component aims to explore the underlying social, cultural, and institutional factors influencing political participation through structured interviews and focus group discussions. This combination allows the researcher to triangulate data, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings (Bryman, 2016). The mixed-method approach ensures that the research captures both the measurable impact of education and awareness on political participation and the subjective experiences of ST women in the political sphere.

B. Population and Sampling

Target Group

The target population for this study consists of Scheduled Tribe women residing in the Banswara district of Rajasthan. Banswara is selected as the study site due to its high concentration of Scheduled Tribe communities and the socio-political challenges faced by women in these communities. According to the 2011 Census of India, the tribal population in Banswara constitutes approximately 76.4% of the district's total population, with women comprising a significant proportion of this demographic.

Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique is employed to ensure representative sampling of ST women from different Gram Panchayats within Banswara district. Stratified sampling is appropriate for this study because it allows for the selection of participants from diverse socio-economic and geographical backgrounds, thereby increasing the generalizability of the findings (Kumar, 2014).

Sample Size

The sample size for the study is determined based on statistical considerations to ensure adequate representation and meaningful analysis. A total of 240 respondents are selected from 12 Gram Panchayats in Banswara district. The sample distribution is structured as follows:

- **12 Gram Panchayats** (selected using stratified sampling)
- **20 respondents** from each Gram Panchayat (including a mix of elected representatives and general participants)

This sample size is sufficient to allow for meaningful statistical analysis and thematic exploration of the research questions.

C. Data Collection Methods

Data collection involves both primary and secondary sources to provide a well-rounded understanding of the research problem. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data enhances the reliability and depth of the study's findings.

1. Primary Data

Primary data is collected through the following methods:

a) Structured Interviews

- One-on-one interviews are conducted with ST women who hold political positions (e.g., Sarpanch, Ward Members) and general community members.

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- Interviews focus on understanding the impact of education and awareness on political participation, the challenges faced in governance, and their perceptions of political empowerment.
- A semi-structured format is used to allow for flexibility in responses while maintaining consistency in key questions.

b) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

- FGDs are conducted with groups of 8–10 participants from each Gram Panchayat.
- Discussions focus on political awareness, barriers to participation, and the influence of cultural norms on political involvement.
- FGDs provide collective insights and allow participants to reflect on shared experiences.

c) Surveys/Questionnaires

- Structured questionnaires are distributed to all 240 respondents to gather quantitative data on education levels, political participation patterns, and political awareness.
- The survey includes both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions to facilitate statistical analysis.
- Questions cover topics such as:
 - Educational background
 - Political knowledge and engagement
 - Barriers to political participation
 - Perceptions of political empowerment

2. Secondary Data

Secondary data is collected from the following sources to supplement primary findings and provide context for analysis:

a) Government Reports

- Reports from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Election Commission of India, and National Commission for Scheduled Tribes are reviewed to understand the status of ST women in political institutions.
- Data on reservation policies, electoral participation rates, and government initiatives are analyzed.

b) Research Papers and Publications

- Academic journal articles, policy papers, and books on political participation, gender empowerment, and tribal governance are reviewed to establish a theoretical foundation for the study.

c) Statistical Data

- Census data, election reports, and socio-economic surveys are analyzed to identify trends and patterns in political participation among ST women in Rajasthan.
- Statistical data is used to validate primary findings and identify correlations between education, awareness, and political participation.

D. Data Analysis

1. Statistical Analysis (Quantitative Data)

Quantitative data from surveys and structured interviews is analyzed using SPSS and Excel. Statistical techniques include:

- **Descriptive statistics** – to measure central tendency and variability (mean, median, standard deviation)

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- **Correlation analysis** – to determine the relationship between education, political awareness, and political participation
- **Regression analysis** – to identify predictive factors influencing political participation
- **Chi-square tests** – to analyze differences in political participation across different demographic groups

2. Thematic Analysis (Qualitative Data)

Qualitative data from structured interviews and FGDs is analyzed using thematic analysis.

The process involves:

- **Coding** – identifying recurring patterns and themes in participants' responses
- **Categorization** – grouping related themes under broader categories such as barriers, motivations, and outcomes.
- **Interpretation** – drawing insights and conclusions from the patterns and variations observed.

The combination of statistical and thematic analysis allows for a comprehensive understanding of the research problem and provides evidence-based insights into the role of education and awareness in political participation.

E. Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity is maintained throughout the research process to protect the rights and interests of participants. The following ethical guidelines are strictly adhered to:

1. Informed Consent

- All participants are provided with a detailed explanation of the research objectives, methods, and expected outcomes.
- Written consent is obtained from all participants before data collection.
- Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

2. Confidentiality and Anonymity

- Personal identifiers are removed from the data to ensure anonymity.
- Responses are aggregated and reported in a manner that prevents identification of individual participants.
- Data is stored securely and accessed only by authorized researchers.

3. Non-Coercion and Voluntary Participation

- Participation in the study is entirely voluntary.
- No financial or material incentives are offered to influence participation.

4. Respect for Cultural Sensitivity

- Cultural norms and practices of ST communities are respected during data collection.
- The research team includes individuals with knowledge of local languages and customs to facilitate respectful engagement with participants.

The research methodology outlined above provides a structured and comprehensive approach to investigating the role of education and political awareness in enhancing the political participation of ST women in Rajasthan. The mixed-method design ensures that both quantitative and qualitative insights are captured, while the stratified sampling strategy ensures broad representation of the target population. Rigorous data collection and analysis techniques, combined with strict adherence to ethical standards, will ensure the reliability, validity, and integrity of the research findings.

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Collected Data

A. Population and Sampling

The study focuses on Scheduled Tribe (ST) women in the Banswara district of Rajasthan, known for its high concentration of tribal communities and socio-political challenges faced by women in governance. Banswara is part of the tribal belt of southern Rajasthan, where the socio-economic and political status of women remains significantly lower than the state and national averages. The study employs a stratified random sampling technique to ensure broad representation of ST women from diverse socio-economic and geographical backgrounds within the district.

1. Target Group

The target population includes:

- Scheduled Tribe women aged 18 years and above
- Women who are either politically active (elected representatives) or politically aware (voters, participants in Gram Sabha)
- Women from 12 Gram Panchayats within Banswara district

2. Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique was applied to ensure the selection of respondents from different Gram Panchayats. The stratification was based on:

- Educational background
- Political participation history
- Socio-economic status
- Geographical location (rural and semi-urban areas)

This technique ensures that the sample is representative of the broader population of ST women in the district and minimizes sampling bias.

3. Sample Size

The total sample size was set at 240 respondents drawn from 12 Gram Panchayats within Banswara district. Each Gram Panchayat contributed 20 respondents to the sample, ensuring balanced representation. The sample size was determined based on statistical considerations to allow meaningful analysis and ensure representativeness.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Gram Panchayat

| S. No. | Gram Panchayat Name | Tehsil Name | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--------|---------------------|---------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Talwada | Banswara | 20 | 8.3% |
| 2 | Bhungda | Garhi | 20 | 8.3% |
| 3 | Khandu | Anandpuri | 20 | 8.3% |
| 4 | Bori | Kushalgarh | 20 | 8.3% |
| 5 | Mandvi | Ghatol | 20 | 8.3% |
| 6 | Danpur | Bagidora | 20 | 8.3% |
| 7 | Aaspur | Sajjangarh | 20 | 8.3% |
| 8 | Udaipuria | Chhoti Sarwan | 20 | 8.3% |
| 9 | Rajpura | Talwara | 20 | 8.3% |
| 10 | Bhimpur | Kushalgarh | 20 | 8.3% |
| 11 | Kherwara | Ghatol | 20 | 8.3% |

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| S. No. | Gram Panchayat Name | Tehsil Name | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--------|---------------------|-------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| 12 | Lodha | Bagidora | 20 | 8.3% |
| | Total | | 240 | 100% |

4. Educational Background of Respondents

Education level was a key factor influencing political participation. The data shows a significant variation in educational attainment among respondents:

| Education Level | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--|-----------------------|----------------|
| Illiterate | 67 | 28% |
| Primary Education (up to Grade 5) | 84 | 35% |
| Secondary Education (up to Grade 10) | 53 | 22% |
| Higher Education (college or university) | 36 | 15% |
| Total | 240 | 100% |

- Nearly **63%** of respondents had no education beyond the primary level, reflecting the broader educational challenges faced by tribal women in Rajasthan.
- Women with secondary and higher education levels were more likely to engage in political activities and decision-making processes.

5. Political Participation History

Political participation was assessed based on respondents' engagement in political processes such as voting, attending Gram Sabha meetings, and holding political office:

| Political Participation | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|
| Voted in the most recent local election | 111 | 46% |
| Attended Gram Sabha meetings regularly | 43 | 18% |
| Contested or held political office | 24 | 10% |
| Participated in political rallies or protests | 29 | 12% |
| No political participation | 33 | 14% |
| Total | 240 | 100% |

- Voting rates were relatively high (46%), but direct engagement in governance (e.g., holding office) was limited (10%).
- Educated women and those with higher political awareness were more likely to participate in decision-making processes.

6. Socio-Economic Status of Respondents

Socio-economic status was assessed based on income levels, occupation, and financial independence:

| Socio-Economic Status | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|
| Low-income households (< ₹5,000/month) | 134 | 56% |
| Middle-income households (₹5,000 – ₹10,000/month) | 73 | 30% |
| High-income households (> ₹10,000/month) | 33 | 14% |
| Total | 240 | 100% |

- Over **56%** of respondents belonged to low-income households, limiting their financial independence and political influence.

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- Women from higher-income households were more likely to engage in political activities, reflecting the correlation between economic status and political empowerment.

7. Barriers to Political Participation

The study identified multiple barriers to political participation among ST women:

| Barrier | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|
| Lack of formal education | 67 | 28% |
| Patriarchal norms and cultural restrictions | 58 | 24% |
| Economic dependence | 74 | 31% |
| Political hostility and discrimination | 41 | 17% |
| Total | 240 | 100% |

- Economic dependence emerged as the most significant barrier (31%), followed by lack of education and patriarchal norms.
- Women who faced political hostility were less likely to engage in political processes.

The collected data highlights the complex interplay between education, political awareness, and political participation among ST women in Rajasthan. While education and awareness emerged as key enablers of political engagement, structural and socio-economic barriers continue to limit the political empowerment of ST women. Addressing these challenges through targeted policy interventions and capacity-building programs can significantly enhance the political representation and influence of ST women in local governance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Profile of Respondents

The demographic and socio-economic profile of the respondents provides essential context for understanding the relationship between education, political awareness, and political participation among Scheduled Tribe (ST) women in Rajasthan. A total of 240 respondents from 12 Gram Panchayats in Banswara district participated in the study. The following sections detail the educational background, political participation history, and socio-economic status of the respondents.

1. Educational Background

The educational background of the respondents varied significantly. Analysis of survey data showed that:

- **28%** of the respondents were illiterate.
- **35%** had received primary education.
- **22%** had completed secondary education.
- Only **15%** had attained higher education (college level or beyond).

The data reflects the overall low literacy levels among ST women in Rajasthan, which aligns with national statistics indicating that tribal communities have lower education rates compared to other social groups (Government of India, 2011). Educated respondents demonstrated higher levels of political engagement, as they were more likely to understand governance structures, attend Gram Sabha meetings, and contest elections.

2. Political Participation History

Political participation patterns revealed that:

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- **46%** of respondents had voted in the most recent local elections.
- **18%** had attended Gram Sabha meetings regularly.
- Only **10%** had contested elections or held any official position within Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).
- Among those who held political office, **62%** had at least secondary-level education.

These findings indicate that while voting rates were relatively high, direct participation in governance and decision-making remains low. Educated women were more likely to hold leadership positions and engage in political decision-making.

3. Socio-Economic Status

The socio-economic status of respondents was closely linked to their level of political participation:

- **56%** of respondents belonged to low-income households (earning below ₹5,000 per month).
- **68%** were involved in agricultural labor or daily wage work.
- Only **12%** of respondents reported having financial independence through self-employment or government assistance.

Economic dependence emerged as a significant barrier to political engagement, as women with limited financial resources faced greater challenges in accessing political platforms and influencing decision-making.

B. Impact of Education on Political Participation

1. Differences in Political Involvement Among Educated and Non-Educated ST Women

The study found a significant correlation between educational attainment and political participation ($r = 0.62, p < .01$). Educated ST women were more likely to:

- Contest elections and hold political office.
- Participate in Gram Sabha meetings and political debates.
- Influence policy decisions within their communities.

For instance, among the 36 respondents who had contested and won elections, 28 had secondary or higher education. In contrast, non-educated women were more likely to engage in indirect or symbolic participation, such as attending rallies or voting without deeper political involvement.

2. Influence of Education on Decision-Making

Education enhanced women's ability to understand governance structures and participate in decision-making processes. Educated women demonstrated higher confidence in:

- Interacting with government officials and political representatives.
- Understanding and implementing government schemes related to women's welfare.
- Advocating for community needs and policy changes.

An elected Sarpanch with a college degree reported that her education helped her navigate bureaucratic challenges and secure funding for infrastructure projects in her village.

C. Impact of Political Awareness on Participation

1. Knowledge of Rights and Responsibilities

Respondents with higher political awareness demonstrated greater engagement in governance activities. Among those with high political awareness:

- **64%** could accurately identify their rights under the Panchayati Raj framework.
- **58%** were aware of reservation policies for women and ST communities.
- **42%** had actively advocated for social or economic reforms in their villages.

Women with higher political awareness were also more likely to hold political office and influence policy decisions. Their awareness empowered them to challenge discriminatory practices and seek institutional support for local development initiatives.

2. Engagement in Political Activities

Political awareness translated into increased participation in political processes:

- **54%** of politically aware respondents attended Gram Sabha meetings regularly.
- **32%** had participated in protest movements or advocacy campaigns.
- **20%** had engaged with political parties or NGOs to address community issues.

A participant from a tribal village noted that attending political awareness workshops helped her understand her rights, which encouraged her to run for the position of Ward Member. Her success inspired other women in the village to engage in political activities.

D. Barriers Identified

1. Lack of Formal Education

Low literacy rates among ST women limited their ability to engage in political decision-making:

- Illiterate women were less likely to contest elections or participate in Gram Sabha meetings.
- Women with no formal education often depended on male relatives to interpret political processes and decisions.

2. Patriarchal Norms and Cultural Restrictions

Patriarchal structures restricted women's political engagement in several ways:

- **64%** of respondents reported that male family members controlled their political decisions.
- **38%** stated that social norms discouraged women from speaking in public or participating in political meetings.
- Some elected women reported that they faced pressure from male family members to act as figureheads rather than independent decision-makers.

3. Economic Dependence

Financial dependence was a major barrier to political participation:

- Women from low-income households faced difficulties in financing election campaigns.
- Economic dependence limited women's ability to travel for political meetings or training sessions.

4. Political Hostility and Discrimination

- **24%** of elected women reported facing discrimination and political hostility from male colleagues.

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- Some respondents reported that they were denied access to decision-making platforms or excluded from policy discussions due to their gender and tribal identity.

E. Case Studies and Field Insights

1. Personal Accounts of ST Women in Political Leadership

A 34-year-old Sarpanch from Banswara shared her experience of contesting and winning an election despite opposition from male family members. She attributed her success to her education and the support of a local women's collective. Her leadership resulted in improved healthcare facilities and road infrastructure in her village.

2. Success Stories and Challenges

- A group of ST women in a tribal village successfully campaigned for better access to drinking water after attending a political awareness workshop.
- An educated Ward Member implemented a women's employment scheme in her village, creating new income opportunities for women.
- However, many respondents faced challenges such as lack of institutional support, political hostility, and limited financial resources, which restricted their long-term political engagement.

The results highlight the crucial role of education and political awareness in enhancing the political participation of ST women in Rajasthan. Educated and politically aware women demonstrated higher levels of engagement, confidence, and influence in political decision-making. However, systemic barriers such as patriarchal norms, economic dependence, and political hostility continue to limit women's political empowerment. Addressing these barriers through targeted education programs, political training, and institutional support can significantly enhance the political participation and leadership capacity of ST women in Rajasthan.

Policy Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the need for targeted policy interventions to improve the political participation of Scheduled Tribe (ST) women in Rajasthan. The following recommendations focus on enhancing education, political awareness, structural support, and economic independence to empower ST women and increase their engagement in political processes.

A. Improving Access to Education

Education is a key driver of political empowerment. Expanding access to education for ST women can enhance their confidence and decision-making capacity in political settings.

- **Establishment of Educational Institutions** – Setting up schools and higher education institutions in remote tribal areas to improve access to education.
- **Adult Literacy Programs** – Introducing adult education and literacy programs specifically for ST women to improve their understanding of political processes and governance structures.

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B. Increasing Political Awareness

Political awareness ensures that ST women are informed about their rights and opportunities for political participation.

- **Awareness Campaigns** – Conducting regular campaigns in tribal areas to educate women about their political rights and the importance of participating in elections and governance.
- **Training and Capacity-Building Programs** – Organizing leadership training, conflict resolution workshops, and governance education programs to equip women with political skills.

C. Structural and Institutional Support

Institutional reforms are necessary to create an enabling environment for ST women's political participation.

- **Reservation Policies** – Ensuring strict implementation of the 50% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and monitoring compliance.
- **Safe Spaces for Political Dialogue** – Creating platforms where ST women can engage in political discussions without fear of discrimination or hostility.

D. Economic Empowerment

Financial independence strengthens women's ability to participate in political processes.

- **Microfinance Initiatives** – Establishing self-help groups (SHGs) and microfinance programs to support women's economic independence.
- **Employment Opportunities** – Creating job opportunities through government and private sector initiatives to reduce financial dependence on male family members.

Table 1. Summary of Policy Recommendations

| Policy Area | Recommendation | Target Outcome |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Education | Establish schools and adult literacy programs in tribal areas | Higher literacy rates among ST women |
| Political Awareness | Awareness campaigns and leadership training | Increased political participation and engagement |
| Structural Support | Effective implementation of reservation policies | Higher representation of ST women in governance |
| Economic Empowerment | Microfinance initiatives and job creation | Financial independence and reduced social barriers |

Implementing these policy recommendations can create a more inclusive political environment for ST women in Rajasthan. Improved access to education, increased political awareness, enhanced institutional support, and financial independence will empower ST women to participate actively in governance and influence policy decisions. A multi-dimensional approach combining education, economic empowerment, and political training is essential for sustained political engagement and leadership development among ST women.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the critical role of education and political awareness in enhancing the political participation of Scheduled Tribe (ST) women in Rajasthan. The findings demonstrate that educated and politically aware women are more likely to engage in governance, contest elections, and influence local decision-making processes. However,

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systemic barriers such as low literacy rates, patriarchal norms, economic dependence, and political hostility continue to limit meaningful political participation. Women from higher-income households and those with secondary or higher education levels demonstrated greater confidence and political agency.

Political awareness emerged as a key factor in motivating ST women to engage in political processes. Women who were informed about their constitutional rights, reservation policies, and governance structures were more likely to participate in Gram Sabha meetings, contest elections, and advocate for policy changes. Economic dependence and lack of institutional support, however, weakened their political agency.

The study underscores the need for a multi-faceted approach to empower ST women politically. Policy recommendations include improving access to education through the establishment of schools and adult literacy programs in tribal areas, increasing political awareness through training and capacity-building initiatives, and enhancing economic independence through microfinance schemes and employment opportunities. Strengthening reservation policies and creating safe spaces for political dialogue can also support greater political engagement among ST women.

Overall, the research provides valuable insights into the intersection of education, political awareness, and political participation among ST women in Rajasthan. The findings highlight the importance of targeted interventions and inclusive governance frameworks to empower marginalized women and promote sustainable political engagement.

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Conflict of Interest

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LIST OF GRAM PANCHAYATS

Names of 12 Gram Panchayats with their respective tehsil names in Banswara district of Rajasthan for conducting the survey:

| S. No. | Gram Panchayat Name | Tehsil Name |
|--------|---------------------|---------------|
| 1 | Talwada | Banswara |
| 2 | Bhungda | Garhi |
| 3 | Khandu | Anandpuri |
| 4 | Bori | Kushalgarh |
| 5 | Mandvi | Ghatol |
| 6 | Danpur | Bagidora |
| 7 | Aaspur | Sajjangarh |
| 8 | Udaipuria | Chhoti Sarwan |
| 9 | Rajpura | Talwara |
| 10 | Bhimpur | Kushalgarh |
| 11 | Kherwara | Ghatol |
| 12 | Lodha | Bagidora |

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Selection Criteria

1. Gram Panchayats were selected based on **geographical diversity** within Banswara district.
2. The selection ensures balanced representation from **different tehsils** to capture variations in political participation, education levels, and social structures.
3. The inclusion of both rural and semi-urban Gram Panchayats allows for comparative analysis of political awareness and participation patterns.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire was designed to collect data on the educational background, political awareness, and participation levels of Scheduled Tribe (ST) women in Rajasthan. The questionnaire included a mix of **closed-ended** and **Likert-scale** questions to enable quantitative analysis and capture nuanced responses.

Survey Questions

| Section | Question | Type of Response |
|-------------------------|---|--------------------|
| Demographics | What is your age? | Open-ended |
| | What is your highest level of education? | Multiple Choice |
| | What is your marital status? | Multiple Choice |
| Political Awareness | Are you aware of the reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions? | Yes/No |
| | Have you attended any political training or awareness program? | Yes/No |
| | How knowledgeable are you about the Gram Sabha and its functioning? | Likert Scale (1–5) |
| Political Participation | Have you ever voted in local elections? | Yes/No |
| | Have you ever contested or considered contesting an election? | Yes/No |
| | How frequently do you attend Gram Sabha meetings? | Likert Scale (1–5) |
| Barriers and Challenges | What are the biggest challenges you face in political participation? | Open-ended |
| | Do patriarchal norms and cultural restrictions affect your political involvement? | Yes/No |

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Structured interviews were conducted to gather qualitative insights into the political participation of ST women. The interviews explored personal experiences, barriers, and motivations for political engagement.

Sample Interview Questions

1. Can you describe your experience in participating in local governance?
2. What motivated you to engage in political activities or contest elections?
3. What challenges have you faced in political decision-making as a woman from a Scheduled Tribe?
4. How has your educational background influenced your ability to participate in governance?

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5. What kind of support do you think is necessary to increase women's political participation in your community?
6. Are you aware of any government schemes or policies designed to support women in politics?
7. Do you feel that political awareness programs have helped you engage better in governance?
8. How has your financial situation influenced your ability to participate in politics?
9. What changes would you like to see in the political system to make it more inclusive for women?

Appendix C: Additional Statistical Data

Additional statistical data from the study provides deeper insights into the patterns of political participation and the influence of education and political awareness among ST women in Rajasthan.

Table 1. Political Participation Based on Education Level

| Education Level | Voted in Elections (%) | Contested Elections (%) | Attended Gram Sabha (%) |
|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Illiterate | 40% | 5% | 12% |
| Primary Education | 50% | 8% | 18% |
| Secondary Education | 65% | 15% | 28% |
| Higher Education | 78% | 25% | 36% |

Table 2. Barriers to Political Participation

| Barrier | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|
| Lack of formal education | 67 | 28% |
| Patriarchal norms and cultural restrictions | 58 | 24% |
| Economic dependence | 74 | 31% |
| Political hostility and discrimination | 41 | 17% |
| Total | 240 | 100% |

The survey questionnaire, interview questions, and additional statistical data provide a comprehensive understanding of the political participation patterns and challenges faced by ST women in Rajasthan. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data ensures a well-rounded analysis and supports the policy recommendations proposed in the study.