CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION
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RESEARCH PROBLEM

Political participation is one of the major areas of study for students of political science. Scholars in political science have tried to investigate why people participate, what are the different variables of political participation, what are the different causes of political apathy and such other related matters and have attempted to understand the functioning of different political systems and the association of people in them. This effort to understand and explore the different aspects of political participation has given new directions to political science research.

Political participation is at the core of every political system. But it is much more important in a democracy because democracy always emphasises on involving the people in the decision making process and it thrives on political participation of people. “If democracy is interpreted as rule by the people, then the question of who participates in political decisions becomes the question of the nature of democracy in a society”¹.

Democracy becomes successful when the active and continuous participation of the different sections of people at
different levels of the decision making system is ensured. Through their participation people select their representatives and authorise them to take decisions on their behalf; this provision ensures the protection of the interests of people. Through their political participation people convey their choice to the decision makers. Political participation integrates the people with the political system and motivates them to make their contributions in the political process of the country.

Political participation implies taking political decisions; it means selecting the right people and taking the right decisions in the political field. Basically, it means presenting one’s choice in political matters. “Political participation refers to those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly and at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or actions they take”\(^2\). Political participation enables ordinary people to enjoy power over rulers.

Participation by the common people in the political process of a democratic set-up is very important. But equally important or more important is the way the leaders are involved in the decision making process because leaders have a special role to play in the political system of the country. The leaders have certain scopes available to them which are not available to the common citizens. The leaders have more information, have
more access to political power, more resources and more likely to hold public offices and because of these factors they have greater potentiality to be more instrumental in the political process of the country. Therefore, the leaders' participation has its own importance in a democratic polity.

India is considered to be the world's largest democracy; but in India, political participation is a major problem. Even after so many years of independence, full political participation of people is yet to be achieved. The grant of political freedom and adoption of the principle of universal adult franchise have not helped in integrating many people into the democratic system of the country. Though the voting percentage has gradually been increasing it is not up to the expected level. Many people are still outside the rim of the country's political system.

However, what is more alarming is the marginalisation of women in the political field. Women constitute about half of the country's population but they have never constituted half of the political leadership in the country. They have always occupied less political space than what their numerical strength deserves. Even the percentage of their voting during election is always less than the male percentage. Thus, politically, women have been the largest disadvantageous group
in the country. The relegation of women in the decision making process has been a disturbing fact and worried the planners, policy executors, social activists, academicians and other interested persons in women issues.

In this scenario, the discussion on participation of women assumes great importance. It is essential that women take interest in the political affairs of the country and come to the mainstream of the political process to make the democratic system more vibrant and successful. Participation of women in the political process is necessary to enable them to solve their different problems, such as safety and security, access to education, employment etc. The potentiality inherent in women would also be utilised in the process of nation-building if they become active politically.

But in India, the participation of women in the political process is dismal. That is true even when women vote in the elections. For example, the highest female voting percentage in any Lok Sabha election was in 1984 election. In that election, the percentage of female voters was 58.60, against the male percentage of 68.18 and the total percentage of 63.56\(^3\). The occupation of different political positions by women such as posts of minister, members of legislative bodies like Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, Legislative Assemblies of states and party
functionaries is more precarious. Because of this reason there has been an increasing need and demand to involve more and more women in the democratic process of the country and make them parts of the different decision making bodies.

If the participation of women in general is not very encouraging in India, then the participation of women in Orissa is equally pathetic. In the state, the male participation has always been more than the women participation. In this context, the participation of women leaders at the grass roots institutions makes for an interesting study as the grassroots institutions train the women as leaders and representatives of people and prepare them to shoulder greater responsibilities and play bigger roles in the political system.

The present research is a humble attempt in this direction which makes an endeavour to study the participation of rural elite women in the political field by making a case study of the positional women leaders of different grassroots institutions in the rural areas of Sundargarh district in Orissa.

The present district of Sundargarh has been created by combining two princely states, Gangpur and Bonai, which were in existence before their merger to the Indian Union in 1948. The district is surrounded by the boarders of two other states, Jharkhand and Chhatisgarh and two other districts of
Orissa, Jharsuguda and Keonjhar. It has a geographical area of 9712 square kilometers.

The district has a total population of 18,31,000 out of which 48.88% are women. The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe people account for 18.61 and 50.18 per cent of the total population respectively.

It is one of the economically developed areas of the state due to large scale industrialisation; but ironically, it has also the distinction of being one of the most backward districts of Orissa.

The district is divided into three sub-divisions, seventeen blocks and two hundred sixty two Gram Panchayats in which more than four thousand members function as representatives of the people, out of them about one third are women.

The district is both a rural as well as a tribal district. The uniqueness of the district makes it a suitable universe for studying political participation of elite women in rural areas from different perspectives.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology refers to “a system of methods and rules applicable to research or work in a given science or art.”
Method used in a research must be a proper method so as to enable the researcher to collect data and information in a proper manner and arrive at a conclusion. It enables a researcher to test the hypotheses of the research work and study the objectives of research. The Chambers Dictionary defines method "as the mode or rule of accomplishing an end".

Methods are techniques instrumental in collecting data and pursue research. The objectives could be studied and the hypotheses are tested by adopting a right method.

First and foremost in a research is the selection of a researchable topic. The more systematic the formulation of a specific research problem is, the easier it becomes for the research scholar to identify the purpose of research. The research scholar gets a clear idea about the data to be collected, how the data are to be collected, how the data are to be presented in a systematic way and how the analysis is to be made. The research problem should be formulated in a clear-cut manner so as to avoid the element of confusion and ensure the successful completion of the project.

The present study "Political Participation of Rural Women Elite: A Study of Sundargarh District in Orissa" is concerned with the study of the nature and extent of participation of rural women leaders in different political activities and
enquires into the different social, economic and political variables of their participation in the political process of the country. The study attempts to ascertain the participation of rural women leaders in the rural political system not only at the time of election but also at the time when there is no election; it tries to probe their political behaviours during election as well as after election and it covers their association and role in the decision making system. It also deals with their self-assessment.

Since this is an empirical study and requires an empirical method for collection of data the personal interview method has been adopted as the primary method for data collection.

In the interview method, “the interviewer himself approaches the respondent, puts questions to him and himself records the replies, usually not bringing it to the notice of the respondent”.

According to Fred, H. Kerlinger “Interview is a face to face interpersonal situation in which one person, the interviewer asks a person being interviewed, the respondent, question designed to obtain answer pertinent to research problems”. To have face to face interaction queries have to be formulated and responses have to be elicited so as to enable the researcher to have his ideas on those responses.
There can be structured questions or unstructured ones. In a close ended questionnaire the respondents are given the choice to choose from the various responses mentioned in the questionnaire. Sometimes the interviewee feels like giving more than one responses to a particular question carrying multiple answers. However, in such a situation, the interviewer has an advantage of placing before the interviewee multiple answers, explaining them the differences and selecting the correct response. Thus, it can help in avoiding any ambiguity in the response as the interviewer can provide clarity to the interviewee.

In this form of questionnaire, the collection of data, their analysis, and interpretation become easy for the interviewer/researcher. At the time of presentation of data it is easier for the researcher to present the collected data in a systematic way. Of course, this type of questionnaire has its own drawbacks for it doesn’t give much scope to the interviewee to explain certain things if he so desires. To overcome that shortcoming sometimes open-ended questions are included in the questionnaire to give scope to the respondents to express their opinion. In such type of questions a multiple choice type answers are not given. The interviewee is, thus, given an opportunity to respond freely. If the target group is small, there
may not be any difficulty. But in case of a large target group, the analysis of data and their interpretation becomes very difficult and the objectives of research can not be achieved smoothly. Therefore, a questionnaire consisting of both types of questions should be considered ideal to test the hypotheses and study the objectives of the research work.

While preparing the questionnaire one should take care to prepare questions in a proper sequence with a language free from any ambiguity. It should also be prepared in a language which is easily understood by the members of the target group. Questionnaire prepared in the mother tongue of the respondents helps in eliciting better responses and the respondents do not feel frustrated or offended.

At the same time, the purpose of research is to elicit the correct information from the respondents. The very purpose of conducting the interview is not to cross examine them and grill them. If the respondents are confronted with some ambiguous and vague questions the aim of research is not achieved. “When writing questions, researchers should avoid double-barreled, ambiguous, vague or leading questions and should use proper vocabulary. Failure to do so may result in uncompleted questionnaires by frustrated or offended respondents and meaningless data for the researcher”\footnote{11}.\footnote{11}
Thus, the questionnaire should be a balanced questionnaire consisting of both close ended and open ended questions, formulated in an easily understandable language by the target group and containing unambiguous and clear questions.

To make the research meaningful, it is necessary to select a broad based target group. While the target group is selected its size should be taken into account. A judicious decision in this regard is most essential. The size of the target group should not be so small that proper conclusions can not be drawn and it should not be so large that analysis will be difficult.

At the same time, it is necessary to study the works of other scholars who have made similar studies and written on the topics related to the theme of research. Therefore, the library materials connected with the research topic must be covered to make the research work more meaningful and relevant. Necessary information from other sources must be gathered to present the work in a more comprehensive manner.

The present research work intends to study “Political Participation of Rural Women Elite”. As the main thrust of the project is to study participation of women leaders at the rural level, the universe of study must be an area where there are a large number of women participating in the political process at
rural level. The area of research must be selected so as to get a target group which will be not only sufficiently large but also consisting of different kinds of members; selection of such a target group makes the research work more broad based and more relevant.

The district of Sundargarh in Orissa has been selected as the universe of this study as this district enjoys the uniqueness of being both a tribal as well as a rural district. Though in Sundargarh district people of all categories starting from the higher caste to the lower and backward groups are found, it is mostly inhabited by people belonging to the Scheduled Tribes. The importance of the Scheduled Tribes inhabitants of the district can be realised from the fact that the sole Lok Sabha constituency of the district and five out of seven Assembly seats of the district are reserved for ST candidates. The area is mostly populated by tribal people of different groups. Hence, such a rural and tribal area provides a suitable universe for studying political participation of women.

As the main focus of this research project is to study the political participation of women in a tribal dominated rural district, care has been taken to make the elected women representatives of the district at the grassroots level such as Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad as the
members of the target group. To make the target group broad based all the positional women leaders of the Panchayati Raj System have been included in it. These leaders, duly elected by people hold office for a certain period of time, exercise some powers and take decisions on behalf of the people they represent. Thus, they provide an ideal target group for making a study of their political participation.

THE TOOL OF RESEARCH

This research project has adopted the interview method as the primary method of data collection and for that purpose a questionnaire has been formulated to interview the respondents and collect information from them. Care has been taken to know the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of the respondents through the questions prepared for the interview method. Some questions are also related to the topic of research. On the basis of this, data are collected, interpreted and presented systematically. In total, 55 questions have been asked to the respondents.

The questionnaire for the present study has been prepared in such a manner so as to get an insight into the socio-economic-political background of the women leaders. The women leaders have been asked questions from which their knowledge of the political system and their self assessment can
be ascertained. The research objectives are reflected in the questions and the responses provide the necessary information to test the hypotheses.

The questionnaire starts with very simple questions on different facts like name, place of residence, position held, etc. and moves on to elicit responses from the women leaders about their ideas of the political system, their attitude and experiences as the representatives of the people and how they intend to solve the problems of the people. They have also been asked questions relating to their self-assessment and confidence to act as the people's representatives.

Most of the questions are close-ended questions. However, the respondents have been provided with many alternative responses to select from the questionnaire. Some questions are also open-ended in nature, where the women leaders are required to give responses based on their own experience and reason.

After making selection of the target group and the area to be covered for field study, the respondents were contacted for interviews. They were approached and requested to give the necessary information. Initially, there were some difficulties in getting responses from some women leaders. As the respondents belong to women of all categories and some of
them are from conservative background, there was initial hesitation in some cases, which could be overcome with repeated efforts. However, when the purpose of data collection and the questions were explained to the respondents all of them gave full cooperation. Sincere effort has been made to contact as many women leaders as possible. Special care has been taken to gain the confidence of the respondents.

For their easy understanding of the questions, at first the respondents were asked simple questions like their name, the Panchayati Raj institutions they belonged to, the positions they held and such other questions which did not take any exertion on the part of the women leaders to answer. After establishing a rapport with the respondents the scholar proceeded to other questions and gathered information. Women leaders from all the three levels of the Panchayati Raj Institutions were interviewed.

In the district there are 4041 grassroots level leaders out of them 1443 are women. Among these female leaders 1243 are Ward Members, 95 are Sarpanchs, 95 are Panchayat Samiti members and 12 are Zilla Parishad members. Women leaders of all categories were given due importance during the field study. All the women leaders of the Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samities were interviewed during the field study. Also, all the Sarpanchs were covered at the time of interview. Among the
Ward Members, 624 of them were interviewed. From the responses of the women leaders a fairly good analysis could be made on the basis of the answers given by them and the information gathered during the field study.

Although the interview method is the principal method of data collection for this work and the questionnaire is the primary tool to gather data from the target group, the library method has not been ignored. It has also been used to collect various facts related to the theme of research by making a study of the similar works of other scholars. Facts available in different government offices have been gathered for this work. Thus, relevant information has been assembled from other research works, official documents, published books and articles in journals and newspapers.

Information gathered from the primary and secondary sources have been analysed and presented in a systematic manner. The data collected have been presented in tabular forms for easy comprehension. Comparisons have been made wherever necessary.

Every effort has been made to make the methodology both qualitative and quantitative.
OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objectives of the research work can be narrated as follows:

1. To analyse the socio-economic-political profile of the women leaders and to examine the pattern of their political culture.

2. To enquire into the pattern of participation of the women leaders in electoral activities.

3. To find out the participation of women leaders in other political activities at the time when there is no election.

4. To know about the nature and extent of participation of the women leaders in decision-making.

HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses have been tested in this study.

1. Education helps women to occupy political position.

2. Majority women leaders have links with political parties.

3. Women leaders want a greater role in the political process of the country.

4. Political participation of majority women leaders is limited only to voting during election.
5. Educated women leaders are more active in decision-making.

SOURCES OF STUDY

Due care has been taken to collect sufficient data for this study to draw conclusions. Data and information from both primary and secondary sources have been collected for this research work.

The various legislations passed by the Governments of India and Orissa from time to time concerning the Panchayati Raj system, particularly the acts relating to the provision for reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribe and women have been very useful for this research work. Different Government documents relating to the grassroots level institutions have been studied for this work. Extracts from the Orissa Gram Panchayat Act 1964, Orissa Panchayat Samiti Act 1994, Extracts from the Orissa Panchayat Samiti Act 1959 and the Zilla Parishad Act 1991, the provisions of the 5\(^{th}\) and 6\(^{th}\) Schedules of the Constitution of India and other Constitutional provisions related to the theme of research have been utilised in this research work. From all these Acts and Constitutional provisions a fair idea can be had about the legal status available to women in India and the Panchayati Raj system operating in the rural areas.
As the research project has adopted the interview method as the primary method of data collection from the respondents a questionnaire has been formulated and different information have been collected after conducting interviews of the members of the target group by making an extensive field study. The responses from the positional women leaders, who form the members of the target group, have been gathered, studied and analysed and those results have been used in this work. The interview schedule is one of the major primary sources of this research work.

Information has also been collected from different Government offices inside the state of Orissa. The materials available at the Tribal Welfare Department, Government of Orissa, Bhubaneswar; the Panchayati Raj Department, Government of Orissa, Bhubaneswar; the Assembly Library, Bhubaneswar and other district level offices located at the headquarters of Sundargarh, such as, District Rural Development Office, the District Panchayat Office, the Municipality Office, the District Election Office, etc. have been used in this work.

Information on General Election to Panchayati Raj Institutions in Orissa, 2002, published by State Election Commission, Orissa, Bhubaneswar gives an idea about the election to Panchayat bodies in the district. Basic Statistics of Sundargarh District published


The writings and publications of several other authors have been very useful for this research. Though it is not possible to give the list of all those works some deserve special mention. A detailed bibliography has been given at the end of the thesis.

There have been a number of scholarly works on the concept of political participation. Terrence E. Cook and Patrick M.
Morgan in their edited book “Participatory Democracy” deal with the theme of participatory democracy. The concept of political participation has been covered thoroughly by Lester W. Milbrath in his work “Political Participation”. Russell J. Dalton’s book “Citizen Politics in Western Democracies” describes citizens’ involvement in political processes in different countries. Marvin E. Olsen’s “Participatory Pluralism” also discusses such a theme. Another book, “Participation in Social and Political Activities” written by David Horton Smith, Jacqueline Macaulay and Associates describes different facets of political activities. “Strategies for Political Participation” by Frank Kendrick, Theodore Fleming, James Eisenstein and James Burkhart presents different aspects of political participation.

There have been some works not directly on the theme of this research work and those have been written for other objectives in mind; but those books are very useful for understanding the concept of political participation. A number of such books can be mentioned. From M. Margaret Conway’s book “Political Participation in the United States” an idea about political participation can be gathered. Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie narrate political participation of American people in their book “Participation in America”. Stuart
Langton's edited volume "Citizen Participation in America" deals with a similar topic.

There are some other books which deal with different aspects of women's political involvement and their struggle for political rights. Maurice Duverger's book "The Political Role of Women" describes the role of women in the political field. Janet A. Flamang edited "Political Women" illustrates the political role of women. Women Studies Group, Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham edited "Women Take Issue, Aspects of Women Subjugation" explains the concept of women's subjugation. Sheila Rowbotham's book "Women in Movement" depicts the picture of women movement for political gains. Barbara J. Nelson and Najma Chowdhury in their edited book "Women and Politics Worldwide" discuss the position of women in different countries.

As the name of the book suggests, Laxmi Menon's "The Position of Women" portrays the position women in Indian society. Vijaya Agnew deals with the elite women in Indian politics in her volume "Elite Women in Indian Politics". Sachidananda and Ramesh P. Sinha describe the actual position of the rights of women in their book "Women Rights: Myth and Reality". In B.K. Pal edited "Problems and Concerns of Indian Women" one can find a picture of the sad condition in which
women remain in India. From "Women and Panchayati Raj" by Susheela Kuasik the role of women in the grassroots institutions can be known.

B. Kuppuswamy's book "Social Change in India" describes the process of social change in India. Similarly, "Social Change in Modern India" by M.N. Srinivas also deals with the same concept. Yogendra Singh in his book "Modernisation of Indian Tradition" explains the modernising process in India. Rajni Kothari's edited book "Caste in Indian Politics" throws lights on the relation between caste and politics in India. A.R.Kamat gives an insight into the process of social change in India in his book "Essays in Social Change in India".

An idea about political culture can be had from the book "The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations" by Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba. Myron Weiner and Samuel P. Huntington' edited volume "Understanding Political Development" makes an attempt to present the concept of political development. "Socialisation: Process, Product and Change" edited by Edward Z. Dager and "New Directions in Political Socialisation" edited by David C. Schwartz and Sandra Kenyon Schwartz are two books which give a thorough idea on the concept of political socialisation.
Some scholarly articles can also be mentioned which deal with different related aspects of the topic of research. Virginia Sapiro's article "Feminism: A Generation Later", in "Annals", 515, May, 1991 and Andrew Reynolds' "Women in the Legislatures and Executives of the World", in "World Politics" describe the specific aspect of women's political involvement.

In the field of Panchayati Raj and grassroots level political leadership some useful works can be mentioned. Some such books are "Rural Elites in an Indian State" by Iqbal Narain, "Rural Elites in a Developing Society" by V.M.Sirsikar and "Modernity and Traditions: Political Development in India" by Leyod Rudolph. A detail description of the evolution of Panchayati Raj system can be found from the book "Dynamics of New Panchayati Raj System" by M.R.Biju. G.Palanithurai's book "New Panchayati Raj System" presents the picture of emerging Panchayati Raj system and empowerment of people through reservation. S.R.Maheswari, in his book "Local Government in India" deals with different aspects of local self government in India.

The various issues of the monthly journal "Kurukshetra" narrate the various matters related to the growth, development, organisation, functions, emerging trends, participation and such other allied aspects of the local self
government in India. For example, mention can be made of the issues of January 1994, April 1995 and February 2000 from which one can find sufficient materials on Panchayati Raj system.

“Theory and Practice in Social Science Research” by Hans Raj and “Political Science Research Methods” by Janet Buttolph Johnson and Richard A. Joslyn are books which are very useful to understand the different methods of research in political science. These books are very useful for selecting a suitable research methodology to carry on a research work.

Some unpublished theses have also been read during the period of research and those have been useful in different ways. To mention a few, S.K.Deo’s “Development Through Panchayati Raj in Cuttack District”, S.C.Jena’s “Nature and Role of Elites in the Development of Indian Villages” and P.K.Mishra’s “Orissa 1900 to 1936: A Study in Political Development”.

The newspapers published in different parts of the state often carry information related to the theme of research. Some materials have also been collected from the Oriya dailies like “The Prajatantra”, “The Samaj” and “The Sambad”.
UTILITY OF THE STUDY

From this research work a thorough idea can be obtained on the concept of political participation. This work will also present a picture of the universe of study.

The study will give an insight into the participation of women in general and that of the rural positional women leaders in the district of Sundargarh in particular. The socio-economic and political profiles of the women leaders will be known from the research work. The research project will give a picture of the pattern of political culture of the women leaders at the grassroots level. The study will analyse the pattern of participation of women leaders in the electoral activities and more importantly, describe their role in the decision-making process in the rural decision making system.

The research topic has much relevance in recent times especially when there is an increasing demand for more power for women. Though many studies have been undertaken on women empowerment and Panchayati Raj those are mostly on the working of the system and on the theme of empowering the women. But this study will deal with the specific aspect of the elite women’s political participation in a rural and tribal area and give an idea of political involvement and capability of women leaders in such an area.
REFERENCES


3. Election Commission of India.


5. *Ibid*.


8. *Ibid*, p.824
