

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATI RAJ: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

In India, 'Panchayati Raj' is seen as an institutional manifestation of 'democratic decentralisation'. It suggests growth and wise leadership. Decentralization of power to the Panchayats is observed as a means of empowering people which is achieved through involving them in decision making process. It is a type of grassroots participatory governance that has been tried out in the third tier of governance in India. But, the study of Panchayati Raj and women's participation are in limited numbers. Participation of women has so far been negligible in the decision-making process in political institution. Studies available on women in the political process in the country are critically limited to on the role of women in the freedom struggle. There are very few studies of women's participation in the electoral process as voters, candidates and members of the legislature and their participation in Panchayats. Apart from this, there has been some superficial examinations of the role of women in public life and studies of women's organizations.

This paper makes a humble effort to study the effectiveness of women's participation and empowerment in Panchayati Raj system. The first part of the paper discusses on 73rd Amendment Act that makes an effort bridging the gap of women's political participation. The second part makes some statistical analysis. While the third part discusses the challenges that women face in participating in panchayats.

Keywords: Participation, Effectiveness, Empowerment, Public life.

I. INTRODUCTION

Decentralization is about good governance. The term “decentralization” is frequently used and is associated with democracy. Local government is one form of a decentralized system. ‘Democratic decentralization is defined “as a meaningful authority that devolves to local units of government.” It is accountable to the local citizenry, who enjoys political rights and liberty.¹ It is affected by the transfer of authority or responsibility for decision making, management or allocation of resources from higher level of government to its subordinate units. It serves as a remedy for authorisation and bureaucracy. The idea is a process of restructuring authority in order to establish a system of co-responsibility between institutions at the federal, regional, and local levels. This has been partly achieved in India by participation of citizens at the grass root level of governance.

The initiative by the government of India giving constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj institutions was taken with the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act in 1993 and in 1994. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act provides one-third reservation for women in grass root levels of

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¹ B.C.BANIK, SANTOSH KUMAR & UC SAHOO, ‘Introduction: Panchyati Raj Institutions and Rural Development; Contextualising the Discourse, PANCHYATI RAJ INSTITUTION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT 2 (Rawat publications, New Delhi, ISBN No 81-316-0107-2).

rural governance. But till date, there is hardly any holistic picture that depicts of qualitative change after the introduction of reservation of in the 73rd Amendment Act. In order to get a proper understanding, this paper analyses on the following objective.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The objective of this research is -

- a. To examine an appraisal of the relationship that women members have with their locality and the role that they played in solving local problems;
- b. To make an assessment of the improvements, if any, made by women members in local bodies in taking, or influencing, decisions; and
- c. To make an examination of the interest evinced by women members in addressing the issues and needs of children and women.
- d. To examine and explore the role played by women representatives of Panchyati Raj Institutions with the help of the available statistics taken from the Ministry of Panchayats, Government of India and that of other states.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW:

There are limited numbers of studies which have assessed the role or effectiveness of Panchayat in empowerment of women. Reliance were placed on the basis of data's mainly collected through various administrative sources like published official documents/reports from formal and informal institutions i.e. Official websites of 'Panchayati Raj' pertaining to the Ministry of Panchayati Raj. References were made from the Planning Commission, the reports of five year plans, the notifications and legislations of Government of India, Eighteenth Report on the subject 'Women participation' in States of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Orissa etc. References were given to government policies also. The study referred to various books, articles published in different journals, newspapers and magazines, archives, electronic sources etc.

The case of affirmative action in India is crucial, as the identity of a woman is layered in the various intersecting forces of caste, class, religion and ethnicity and is not manifested only in terms of 'gender'. Hence a fresh look is required. Based on the above, the following research questions have been formulated as under –

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- Whether the participation of women as elected representatives in PRI in respect of their mobility, network and sphere of interaction with Panchayat members at different levels, community and higher level have progressed?

- Whether such reservation has brought qualitative change in the democratic process and in lives of women elected representation and women in general.

V. HYPOTHESIS:

- The elected women representative have been high in the local bodies which apparently has brought a quantitative change in the last twenty years.
- The given conservative background, do the women members' actually participate in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, being an unchartered area, the need is felt for this study.

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH:

The methodology of the study in this paper adopted is 'doctrinal method'.

What is Democratic decentralisation in India context?

To quote Prime Minister Narendra Modi "The democratic spirit is integral to our civilization ethos. Elected republican city-states such as Lichhavi and Shakya prospered in India as far as 2500 years back. The democratic ideal is fundamental to the character of our civilization. Elected republican city-states like Lichchhavi and Shakya flourished in India.. The 'Uttaramerur' inscription from the 10th century, which established the fundamentals of political participation, exhibits the same democratic ethos. One of the most prosperous nations in ancient times, i.e. India had a very democratic attitude and ethos which is an interal part of Indian civilization. The term 'Sabha'(gathering),' Samiti' (smaller unit or Committee) 'Rajan' or Raja (Householder, Leader) existed and were found in Vedic literatures. Centuries of colonial rule could not repress the democratic spirit of the Indian people which found full expression with India's independence, and led to an unparalleled story in democratic decentralized nation-building over the last 75 years."

One of the fundamental tenets of democracy that emerged in India in the form of Panchayati Raj, or local self-government groups, is 'democratic decentralisation'. It covers the village level (Gram Panchayat), clusters of villages (block Panchayat) and the district level (District Panchayat). Originating in the ancient Indian subcontinent it is found in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

In India, 'Panchayati Raj' is seen as an institutional manifestation of 'democratic decentralisation'. It suggests growth and wise leadership. Decentralization of power to the Panchayats is observed as a means of empowering people which is achieved through involving them in decision making process. It is a type of grassroots participatory governance that has been tried out in the third tier.

VI. THE PANCHAYATI RAJ EXPERIMENT

The state of Andhra Pradesh was the first to experiment with democratic decentralisation in 20 blocks at the rate of one block in each district in 1958.² Local governments being closer to the people can be more responsive to local needs and can make better use of resources. Therefore, the system of democratic decentralization popularly known as ‘Panchayati Raj’ is considered as an instrument to ensure democracy and socio-economic transformation. Added to this is the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act which provided space for reservation ensuring participation of women and the marginalized sections.

Considerable headway has been made since the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Amendments. As a result, around 2, lakhs Panchayats at the village level; 6022 Panchayats at the intermediate level and 535 Panchayats at the district were constituted. These Panchayats are being manned by about 29.2 lakh elected representatives. This has led to the broadening of democracy.³ Many States have devolved functions and powers to local authorities. For example; State Finance Commissions have been constituted and have made recommendations for resource allocations to PRIs. “Panchayat” has been used as a key term in governance in India too.⁴

Since the implementation of the 73rd Amendment, until 31st May 1998, there were 768,582 women in Gram Panchayats (GPs), 38,582 in Panchayat Samitis, and 4,030 in Zilla Parishads. However, this number was still less than one-third of the total seats reserved for women.⁵ Although these Acts provide a skeletal uniformity to local government across India, a number of provisions were left to the discretion of the respective state legislatures, to be specified in their conforming Acts.⁶

After Amendment Acts,⁷ the Parliament succeeded in bringing in political decentralization. These amendment acts provide the constitutional guarantee to

² S P Aiyar; “*Democratic Decentralisation Experiment in India*”, The Economic Weekly, January 14, 1961, https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/1961_13/2/democraticdecentralisationexperiment_in_india.pdf.

³ M L KANTHA RAO; “*Goverance Reforms through Decentralisation: With specific reference to Andhra Pradesh*,” GOOD GOVERANCE AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH; REFORMS AND DEVELOPMENT, Regal Publications, 2013, New Delhi, ISBN 978-81-8484-251-7.

⁴ Poornima Vyasulu and Vinod Vyasulu; ‘*Women in Panchyati Raj Grass Roots Democracy in Malgudi*’, Decentralisation and local Governments, The Indian Experience, EPW Orient Swam 2018, pg 77

⁵ Tyagi and Sinha, 2004

⁶ India’s Constitution specifies local government as a “concurrent subject” that can be legislated on by both the central and the state government and is subject to national level legislation only on the request of a minimum of three states.

⁷ The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 added Part IX consisting of 16 Articles and the Eleventh Schedule to the Constitution; the Constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992 added Part IX-A consisting 18 Articles and Twelfth Schedule to the Constitution.

basic and essential features of the self-governing democratic institutions in rural and urban areas, reservation of seats to SCs, STs and women and devolution of financial and administrative powers. The provisions of the amendment acts ensured that one third of the total elected seats and positions of chairpersons in rural and urban local bodies would go to women.⁸ This initiation was a critical turning point in the development of grassroots democratic institutions in the nation. It hoped to empower women. In the history of state initiatives on the political empowerment of rural women, the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution and the insertion of measures under Article 243 are viewed as turning points. It suggested a paradigm shift in how the cause of women was approached. As a result of political decentralization, about one million women were estimated to emerge as leaders at the grass root level in the rural areas alone, of these, 75,000 were chairpersons.⁹ Considering the importance of gender equality in realization of human rights, the new provisions engrafted in the Constitution engrafted along way in bringing women at the equal stratum.¹⁰

VI. EMPOWERMENT

Participation and empowerment are closely linked with each other being an integral part of democratic decentralization. Therefore, it is necessary to know what empowerment means as it has linkage to democratic decentralization. The term ‘empowerment’ has many dimensions and is used in different contexts like global, economic, political, national, personal, collective, and social.

The dimension that was adopted by the United Nations Development Programme in 1996 as it was gender perspectives in development goals. It included a commitment to promote the empowerment of women in political and economic decision-making. It suggested that empowerment would be promoted through increasing women’s decision-making powers with the support for income generating activities and provision of skills and education to women. Thus, the term ‘Empowerment’ has been used in relation to women.

⁸ INDIA CONSTI. Article 243D (3) of the Constitution provides that —Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.

INDIA CONSTI. Article 243T (3) of the Constitution provides that —Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality.

⁹ LEILA SETH; ‘TALKING OF JUSTICE: PEOPLE’S RIGHTS IN MODERN INDIA’, 123 ALEPH, New Delhi, 2014

¹⁰ Sanjit Kumar Chakraborty; “ *Women’s Rights in India: A Constitutional Insight*” (2018), Prof. (Dr.) N.K. Chakrobarati (eds.), Gender Justice 129-183 (R. Cambray & Co. Pvt. Ltd., Kolkata, 2018, ISBN 978-81-89659-33-2), Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3688004> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3688004>

Like ‘women’s welfare’, ‘up liftment’, ‘development’, ‘awareness’ and ‘reservation’.¹¹

Women development movements and feminists used the term ‘women empowerment’ in order to include women in the development process. Sometimes, it was also termed as ‘racial empowerment’ when used in the black and civil- rights, and ethnic minority movements.

However, empowerment is now used to indicate both, a process of empowering groups or individuals, and an outcome in which a person or group is empowered. The term ‘empowerment’ has been used for more than two decades. There is no fixed authoritative definition on the term .In general it means ‘power to think and act freely’ refers to the marginalized group to exercise their choice, and fulfill their potential as full and equal members in the society.

VII. THE INDIAN SCENARIO

Indian culture assigns the women the responsibility of primarily parenting and nurturing. They accordingly, develop a psychological make-up and choose to confine themselves to the private sphere i.e. home. This has resulted in women being marginalized in all spheres of activity more specifically political. Along with these general precepts the social environment of the women undoubtedly affects her political participation.

Independent India straightway took the plunge when it framed its Constitution vide Articles 325¹² and Article 326¹³ and granted the right to vote to all its citizens. Thus, political empowerment of women means participation and exercising political rights. In other words, it means not only exercising the right to vote, but also power sharing, co-decision making, co-policy making at all

¹¹ Pamela Singh; “*Participation-Concept and available framework*”, Women’s Participation in Panchayati Raj, Nature and Effectiveness, Rawat publications, ISBN 978-81-316-0119-8, pg 81.

¹² INDIA CONSTI. Article 325: “*No person to be ineligible for inclusion in, or to claim to be included in a special, electoral roll on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex.— There shall be one general electoral roll for every territorial constituency for election to either House of Parliament or to the House or either House of the Legislature of a State and no person shall be ineligible for inclusion in any such roll or claim to be included in any special electoral roll for any such constituency on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or any of them*”.

¹³ INDIA CONSTI. Article 326: “*Elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assemblies of States to be on the basis of adult suffrage.— The elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assembly of every State shall be on the basis of adult suffrage; that is to say, every person who is a citizen of India and who is not less than eighteen years of age on such date as may be fixed in that behalf by or under any law made by the appropriate Legislature and is not otherwise disqualified under this Constitution or any law made by the appropriate Legislature on the ground of non-residence, unsoundness of mind, crime or corrupt or illegal practice, shall be entitled to be registered as a voter at any such election.*”

levels of governance of the State.¹⁴

India's founding father Mahatma Gandhi had conceived of India's independence with village as the base of the whole structure. He visualized that "Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or panchayat having full powers in this structure composed of innumerable villages; there will be ever widening, never ascending circles." (Harijan: 1946).¹⁵ But later, it was made a part of the Directive principles of State Policy vide Article 40 of the Constitution of India.¹⁶

Participation of women has so far been negligible in the decision-making process in political institution. Studies available on women in the political process in the country are critically limited to

- a) On the role of women in the freedom struggle,
- b) Women in the electoral process as voters, candidates and members of the legislature and
- c) Their participation in Panchayats after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment.
- d) Apart from this there have been some superficial examinations of the role of women in public life and studies of women's organizations

WOMEN'S 64th AMENDMENT RESERVATION BILL.

As part of the process of empowering women, the 64th and 65th Amendment Bills of the Indian Government suggested a nearly 30 percent reservation in favour of women in the membership of panchayats at all three levels, in the total seats as well as in the SC/ST seats. The process of adding reservations was tentative and slow, and the chairperson's position was only reluctantly added in the final bill. However, the Rajya Sabha rejected the Bills. The reservation rate for women rose to 33 percent in 1989 with the advent of the National Front. But the Bill was approved by the Narasimha Rao administration. The reserve remained at 33 percent in the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, which were submitted in September 1991 and became the 72nd and 73rd in 1992, respectively. In 1993, it became part of the Constitution.

However, attempts to enact a 33 percent reserve for women in Parliament have fallen short. The 81st constitutional amendment bill, which would have allocated

¹⁴ J.P. Singh; "Indian Democracy and Empowerment of Women", XLVI (4), the Indian Journal of Public Administration 618 (2000).

¹⁵ Nirmala Buch, "Women's Experience in new Panchayats: The emerging leadership of rural women", <https://www.cwds.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/WomensExperiencePanchayats.pdf>

¹⁶ INDIA CONSTI. Article 40-"The State shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government."

33 percent of the seats in Parliament to women, was introduced in the Lok Sabha in 1996. Finally, in 2010, it was approved by the Rajya Sabha, but the Lok Sabha has not yet taken action.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS: RESERVATION FOR WOMEN IN VILLAGE PANCHAYAT¹⁷

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 passed by the Parliament ensures one third of the total status for women in all elected officers in local bodies whether in rural areas or urban areas. The amendment ordains that every state shall have panchayats at the village, intermediate.¹⁸ The amendment mentions down that every state shall have panchayats at the village, intermediate and district level having a population not exceeding twenty lakhs of population at intermediate level.¹⁹ Panchayats is an elected body for a term of five years.²⁰ If it is dissolved sooner, it requires that elections to be held within six months.²¹

These provisions in the constitution helped in conferring uniformity in the structure of gram panchayats at village level with a variation of total number of members in a gram panchayat which varies on the basis of total population of the village and enactments passed by the respective states legislatures,²² no doubt, on the pattern suggested by 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. Thus, the 73rd Amendment brought decentralisation reform and through 33 percent of reservation for women ensured the participation and inclusion of marginalised and historically excluded groups in the process of governance.

Achieving proper representation for all groups also entails persuading the village's impoverished and marginalised residents to engage politically and meaningfully. The Gram Sabha institution and the mechanisms for reserving seats for members and chairpersons' offices have both been included in the constitutional amendment to serve this objective. In accordance with national reservation policy, the states' panchayat raj legislation not only stipulates the reservation of seats for SC/ST, women, and members of historically underrepresented castes, but it is also put into practise.

The provision made in the amendment by the Parliament to endow the panchayats with such powers and authority as enable them to function as institutions of local self-government. Law may contain provisions for the devolution responsibilities upon panchayats at appropriate level (a) preparation of plans for economic development and the implementation of schemes for economic development,

¹⁷ 73rd and 74th Amendment of Indian Constitution came into operation on 24th April 1993

¹⁸ Article 243-B (1), The Gazette of India Extraordinary Part-II, Section-I, The Constitutional (Seventy-Third Amendment) Act 1992, Ministry of Law, Justice

¹⁹ Article 243-B-2, *ibid.*

²⁰ Article 243 -E-1, *ibid.*

²¹ Article -243-3b, *ibid.*

²² Article- 243-C, *ibid.*

justice including those in relation to the matters listed Schedule of the Constitution.²³

WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS – FACTS AND STATISTICS:

Democracy ensures empowerment, while Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) guarantees participation of all segments of society in the process. This in turn creates power in an individual's own life, society and community. Hence, 'empowerment' is a process. Central and State governments have implemented many programmes to provide equal opportunities in education, employment and to improve economic status of women.

When independence was declared, Mahatma Gandhi observed: "As long as women of India do not take part in public life there can be no salvation for the country; the dream of decentralization could never be fulfilled. It would have no use for the kind of Swaraj to which such women have not made their full contribution"²⁴

According to Global Gender Gap Report 2012, the rank of India is 105 out of 135 countries based on the composite index of economic participation, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival.²⁵The demographic figures for women in India also show considerable disparities between women and men, these differences being the result of the traditional view that men are superior to women.

RESERVATION FOR WOMEN:

In 1992, when the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments introduced local self-governance to consciously empower women as decision makers with 1/3rd of the seats reserved for women. Through this amendment, one-third of the seats are reserved for women as members and chairpersons of these institutions. These amendments gave a 33 percent reservation to women in local bodies to promote the political participation of women in the decision making process and public policy and to bridge the gender gap in politics at the local level, where the society is still running on patriarchal lines and aristocrat behaviour.

POST 73rd CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT ERA:

Kanataka was the first state in India to introduce a policy of reservation for women in Panchayati Raj institutions in 1985. It provided for 25 percent reservation for women at the district and mandai panchayat levels. The

²³ Article 243-G.The Constitutional (Seventy-Third Amendment) 1992.

²⁴ M.K. Gandhi; "*India of My Dreams*", Chapter 54: *Regeneration of Indian Women*, <https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/my-dream-india/chapter-54-regeneration-of-indian-women.php>

²⁵ "*Global Gender Gap report*",2022, World economic forum; https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf.

experiences in the states of Kamataka, West Bengal, and Andhra Pradesh, were followed by some recommendations of the Ashok Mehta Committee. This further intensified the notion that women's presence in the PRIs would be a crucial step towards furthering local involvement in development planning. Approximately 3 million elected Panchayat officials at different levels staff these Panchayats.²⁶ The 73rd Constitutional Act and different Panchayat Acts of different states have provided the basis for political empowerment. As per the information available from the ministry, some 20 states have brought reservation for women and the mariganilised in panchayats.

As per provisions contained in the Constitution, “1/3rd of the Seats of Panchayati Raj Institutions and 1/3rd offices of the Chairperson at all level of Panchayati Raj Institutions which is covered by Part IX of the Constitution are reserved for women.²⁷ The following states like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tripura and Uttarakhand have made legal provision for 50 percent reservation for women among members and Sarpanches.²⁸ Thus, women’s entry into panchayats, both as members as well as heads has pushed them into the process of decision-making and policy implementation considerably. Table 1.1 enlists the percentage of Elected Women Representatives (EWR) in different states of India.

TABLE-1.1

ELECTED WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES OF DIFFERENT STATES IN INDIA, 2018²⁹

States	No. of Panchayats			Elected Representatives		
	District Level	Intermediate Level	/Village Level	Total	Total Women	Women (%)
Chandigarh	1	1	12	NA	NA	-
Jammu and Kashmir	22	323	4453	38282	11169	29
Goa	2	NA	191	1559	514	33
Haryana	21	126	6205	68152	24876	37
Uttar Pradesh	75	821	59075	718667	297235	41
Telangana	9	438	8695	103468	46702	45
Odisha	30	314	6211	100791	49697	49
Andhra Pradesh	13	660	126920	156049	78025	50
Assam	21	191	2193	26844	13422	50

²⁶ <https://www.pria.org › panchayat>

²⁷ INDIA CONSTI. Article 243 D.

²⁸ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Panchayati Raj published on 12th August 2011; <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=74501>

²⁹ Ministry of Panchayat Raj, Government of India.

Maharashtra	34	351	28031	203203	101466	50
Sikkim	4	NA	176	1099	549	50
West Bengal	19	341	3342	59296	29579	50
Karnataka	30	176	6021	95307	50892	53

ELECTED WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN UNION TERRITORIES³⁰

UT's	No. of Panchayats			Elected Representatives		
	District			Total	Total Women	
	Intermediate Level	Village Level		Total Women (%)		
Dadar Nagar Haveli	1	NA	20	136	47	35
Andaman and Nicobar	2	9	70	NA	NA	NA
Lakshadweep	3	N.A.	10	NA	NA	NA

Table 1.1 above presents the total elected members in different states of India. For example, elected women representative in the state of Jammu and Kashmir is 29 percent, followed by Goa with 33 percent, Haryana having 37 percent, 41 percent in Uttar Pradesh, Telangana having 45 percent and so on.

Today, there are about 3 million elected representatives of these panchayats, out of which 1.3 million are women actively participating in Panchayats, according to *Ministry of Panchayati Raj* (Bhatnagar, 2019).³¹ However, the mere presence of women does not guarantee the quality or effectiveness of their participation, that their voices will be heard in critical decisions, or that concerns of women electorates will automatically be championed. Many women elected to local government on reserved quotas are new to the public sphere of politics, while several others are inexperienced with governance institutions, and unfamiliar with procedures and protocols of formal meetings.

The Table – 1.2 enlists State – wise women representatives in PRIs in the year 2020.

TABLE-1.2

³⁰ Source: Ministry of Panchayat Raj, Government of India.

³¹ “Take Five: “Elected Women Representatives are key agents for transformational economic, environmental and social change in India”, UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/7/take-five-rahul-bhatnagar-india>

STATUS OF WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN PANCHAYATI RAJ IN DIFFERENT STATES AND UNION TERRITORIES OF INDIA AS ON 23rd Sep. 2020

Number of Women Representatives (EWRs) in Panchayati Raj Institutions in the in the country, State/Union Territory-wise in the year 2020³²

UTs/STATES IN INDIA	Total PRI Representative s	Total EWRs	Percentage of women in PRI
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	147	47	31.97%
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	858	306	35.66%
Lakshadweep	110	41	37.27%
Daman & Diu	192	92	47.91%
Jammu & Kashmir	39850	13224	33.18%
Uttar Pradesh	913417	304538	33.34%
Goa	1555	571	36.72%
Arunachal Pradesh	9383	3658	38.98%
Punjab	100312	41922	41.79%
Haryana	70035	29499	42.12%
Tripura	6646	3006	45.23%
Madhya Pradesh	392981	196490	49.99%
Gujrat	144080	71988	49.96%
Andhra Pradesh	156050	78025	50%
Karnataka	101954	51030	50.05%

³² <https://ruralmarketing.in/stories/know-the-numbers-of-women-representatives-in-gram-panchayats/>

Himachal Pradesh	28723	14398	50.12%
Rajasthan	126271	64802	51.31%
Jharkhand	59638	30757	51.57%
Bihar	136573	71046	52.02%
Kerela	18372	9630	52.41%
Assam	26754	14609	54.60%
Chhattisgarh	170465	93392	54.78%
Ladakh	NA	NA	NA
Manipur	1736	880	50.69%
Odisha	107487	56627	52.68%
Maharashtra	240635	128677	53.47%
Sikkim	1153	580	50.30%
Tamil Nadu	106450	56407	52.98%
Telangana	103468	52096	50.34%
Uttarakhand	62976	35177	55.85%
West Bengal	59229	30458	51.42%
Total	3187320	1453973	45.61%

An analysis of Table 1.2 depicts the latest statistics of elected women representative of all states of India reveal a total 1.453973 lakh elected women representatives in PRI .Women representatives in Jammu and Kashmir is minimum with 33 .83 percent. Comparatively, women representatives in Bihar comprise 71,406, which make around 52.02 percent. Himachal Pradesh has 50.12 percent while Jharkhand (a tribal dominated state) has 51.57 percent. Chattisgarh has 54.78 percent of women representatives in Panchayats. Likewise, Rajasthan

has 126271 lakh representatives out of which 64802 are elected women representatives. Uttarakhand, a hill dominated state has 55.85 percent of women representatives. Surprisingly a bigger state like Uttar Pradesh, the scenario is startling. Out of the 9.13417 lakh representatives, 3, 04538 are women, which makes around 33.34 percent despite the state having 50 percent of reservation in Panchayats.³³

THE IMPACT:

The outcome of statistics shown in Table-1.7 also elicits that the percentages of women at various levels of political activity have shifted dramatically as a result of the constitutional change, from 4-5 percent before to 25-40 percent after. But the difference is also qualitative, because these women are bringing their experience in the governance of civic society. In this way they are making the state sensitive to the issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice.³⁴ Today, around fourteen states of India have 50-58 percent representation of women in Panchayat Raj Institutions in which Jharkhand leads the way with 59 percent closely followed by Rajasthan and Uttarakhand.

WOMEN AS SARPANCH

Women Sarpanch accounts for nearly 43 percent of total gram panchayats across the country. Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of women sarpanches at 19,992 but only 34 percent of total sarpanches. The state of Odisha has 3600 woman sarpanches, an above average 58 percent of the total number. Manipur has the least percentage of women sarpanches with just 2 percent representation.³⁵

TABLE-1.3

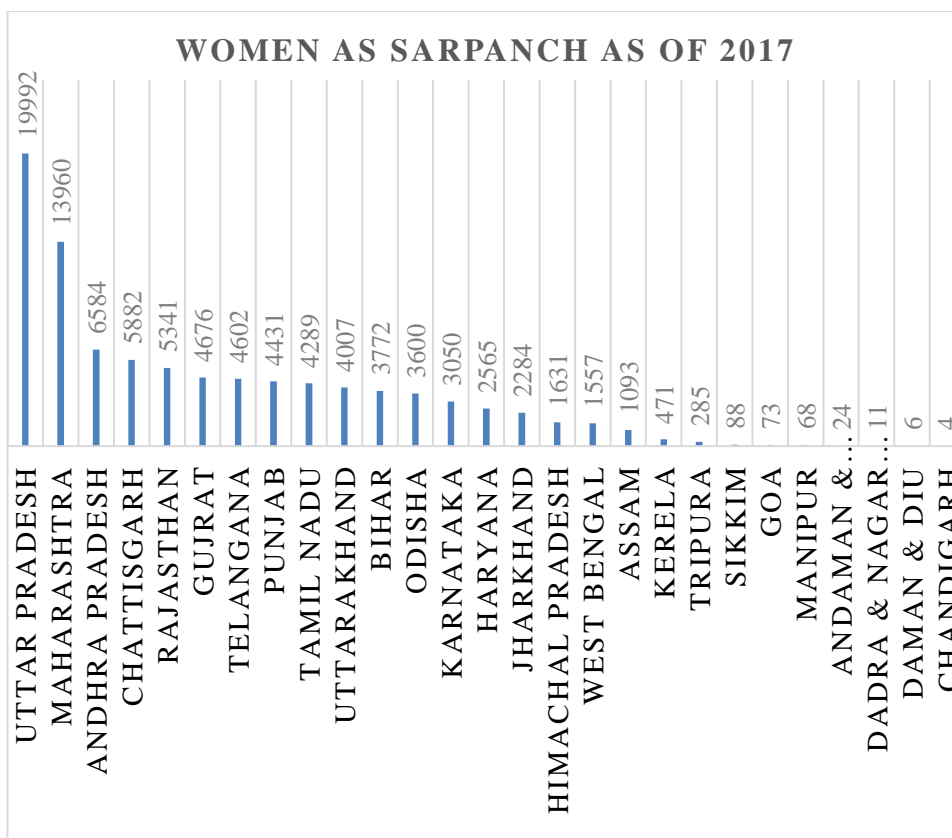
NUMBERS OF WOMEN AS SARPANCH (YEAR 2017)³⁶

³³ The Print, 24th April 2021, <https://theprint.in/opinion/77-women-in-panchayati-raj-institutions-believe-they-cant-change-things-easily-on-ground/644680>(assessed on 14th December 2021).

³⁴ Shashi Kaul and Shradha Sahni; 'Study on the Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institution', https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321219264_Study_on_the_Participation_of_Women_in_Panchayati_Raj_Institution

³⁵ Tejasmi Pratima Dodda; "Representation to Participation: Women in Panchayat Raj Institutions & State Assemblies, 7th April 2018; <https://factly.in/representation-to-participation-women-in-panchayat-raj-institutions-state-assemblies/>

³⁶ <https://factly.in/representation-to-participation-women-in-panchayat-raj-institutions-state-assemblies>



Source: 16th July, Hindustan Times

The Table 1.3 depicts the number of women Sarpanches as on 2017. The statistics above reflects that many states in India have very few women Sarpanches even though completing three decades of the Constitutional Amendment Act. The Institution of “Sarpanch-pati” or “Adhyaksha-Pati” might not have any legal sanction, but it is thriving in many Panchayats in many states of India

THE CHALLENGES AND HURDELS:

Traditionally politics has been perceived as a male domain. Men always enjoy higher visibility in public and political affairs while women have to stay away from political affairs and remain in private domain. Traditional mindset of people supports exclusion of women from political life.

GENDER INEQUALITY

WOMEN AS ‘RUBBER STAMPS/ PROXIES

This lead on the subject of discussion on the sarpanch patis, where the husband of the woman sarpanch manages the affairs of the Panchayat and she is only a

proxy candidate.³⁷ It is also found that most women file their candidature for elections to PRI s not out of their own will, but due to the pressure of husbands, sons or other male member of the family or the village or due to the pressure of some political party. The proxy representation in Panchayats has become quite common.

LOW EDUCATION LEVEL

Yet, some drawbacks embedded in the system have also surfaced, demanding rectification as soon as possible for translating its noble objectives into reality. Many women pradhans, who haven't progressed beyond high school, have neither empowered themselves nor been at the forefront of decision- making for the communities they lead.

CORRUPT PRACTICES IN ELECTIONS

It is further argued that Panchayat elections have come to be dominated by the prevalence of corrupt practices. Political atmosphere is also considered as one of the deterrents which create an unfavourable condition for women's participation in political processes. Power games are controlled by monetary deals. Political processes have become expensive. The cost of election also put hindrance as few women have own income and hardly they own productive resources.³⁸

CASTE POLITICS

The election of scheduled caste women as political leaders question the traditional social hierarchy of Indian villages and discrimination based on deep-rooted caste prejudices is commonly used by upper castes to maintain status quo. Their work is accepted only as long as they don't challenge the power of men or question male privileges, e.g. by addressing issues of alcohol abuse or domestic violence.³⁹

PREVALENCE OF VIOLENCE:

Further, the atmosphere of growing violence, character assassination and unscrupulous struggle for power, have been a serious deterrent to women's participation in political process. The prevalence of violence that has come to be associated with the PRJ elections in many states also impedes the free and fair participation of women in the processes of village self-governance. Most such violence seems to have been resulting from the existence of 'caste4

³⁷ 'Women's empowerment through Panchayati Raj'; Centre for Developments of Human Rights, From *Bulletin Archives: originally published in June 2009*, <http://www.cdhr.org.in/womens-empowerment/womens-empowerment-through-panchayati-raj/>

³⁸ Shivani Phukam,; "*Participation of women in PanchayatiRaj institutions: a study of JorhatZilaParishad*"
[dspace.nehu.ac.in/bit stream/1/7181/1/S%20Phukan%20Pol%20Sc.pdf](http://dspace.nehu.ac.in/bitstream/1/7181/1/S%20Phukan%20Pol%20Sc.pdf)

³⁹ Ibid

war'(Panchayati Raj Update 2001) where people belonging to lower castes⁵ are tortured and murdered for daring to stand against upper caste candidates.

Further, prevalent societal restrictions require that women do not venture into public spaces alone. The traditional patriarchal concept of women's real place being within the four walls of the house is strongly prevalent in rural India. Due to the traditional household role assigned to women, the dominant belief is that if women go out of the four walls of the house to participate in local politics then it would mean that the men do not have any hold on her.

LOW SALARY

One of the major causes of such corruption is argued to be the fact that the salaries paid to PRJ-members are extremely low. This impedes their participation in the decision making deliberations in the PRI's.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS:

DEVELOPMENT PLANS

The identification of implementing agency should be done by the village panchayat subject to the approval of the block panchayat. Village panchayat should arrange for accommodation for the programme. Village panchayats must provide linkages with community and assist the implementing agency in seeking their participation. Village panchayat should also verify whether benefits are reaching the bonafide beneficiaries.

It may identify gaps and problems in implementation of the programmes and communicate them to the programme agencies and administrative bodies for their rectification.

All the programmes related to empowerment of SCs are implemented through the State Governments. Therefore, PRIs being at the grass-root level institutions must evolve itself for promoting self-governance equitably / effectively.

ICDS PROGRAMME

The village level panchayat should also see that the ICDS center's operate regularly and necessary equipment's like weighing machines are available and in working order. District and Block level panchayats should arrange training programmes for anganwadi workers, ensure timely supply of food supplements / equipment. It must review the implementation of the schemes, and promote inter-sect oral linkages particularly between health and nutrition staff and review impact of the programme on mal-nourished children.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT

For empowering the SCs, the nodal Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment implements various programmes, which encompass welfare, development and protective measures. These include-

a) educational developmental programmes such as Post-Matric Scholarships, Pre-Matric Scholarships, Provision of Hostels, Special Educational Development Programmes for SC girls and Coaching and Allied schemes etc;

b) Economic Development Programmes such as employment and income generating activities supported through National and State level SC/ST Finance and Development Corporations and iii) Social justice and protective measures through implementation of PCR Act (Protection of Civil Rights) 1955 and the SC/ST POA (Prevention of Atrocities) 1989 and the Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers

CONCLUDING REMARK:

The reservation provisions have brought an influx of women and have transformed grassroots democracy and given rural women the power to exercise their right and be involved in village governance. Currently, twenty states in India have made provisions in their respective State Panchayati Raj Acts and increased the reservation of women to 50 percent. Efforts are on to increase the reservation from 1/3rd to 1/2 all over India.⁴⁰ Additionally, states such as Odisha have made it mandatory that if the chairperson in a village is a man, the vice-chairperson must be a woman. As of now, Jharkhand leads the way with 58 percent, closely followed by Rajasthan and Uttarakhand.⁴¹

The most crucial obstacle in the way of real political empowerment of women through Panchayati Raj has seen to occur at the stage of the filing of the nomination for candidature itself. While summing up, it can be stated that the reservation for women has been an important impetus to women's empowerment in India on village level but there is no guarantee for the participation of the elected women in the decision making process. Steps are being taken to overcome these hindrances, but it is a time-consuming process. Inclusion or representation of women by itself is not a solution; there is difference between formal power and effective power. There clearly exists a discrepancy between the formal and effective use of power of elected women. Changing the gender composition of elected assemblies is largely an enabling condition but it cannot present itself as a guarantee. There is a need to change many aspects of the existing gender

⁴⁰ Dr Rajesh Kumar Sinha; *Women in Panchayat*; Kurukshestra, July 2018; https://www.pria.org/uploaded_files/panchayatexternal/1548842032_Women%20In%20Panchayat

⁴¹ EJESWI PRATIMA DODDA; '*Representation to Participation: Women in Panchayat Raj Institutions & State Assemblies*' 7th April, 2018, <https://factly.in/representation-to-participation-women-in-panchayat-raj-institutions-state-assemblies/>

relations, power distribution and to take hard decisions concerning power-sharing.

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