

An Empirical Analysis of the Empowerment of Rural Women Through Panchayati Raj Institution: Ujjain District of Madhya Pradesh

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Abstract: This paper has attempted to investigate the political participation of the rural women and their actual condition in the panchayati raj institutions in the Ujjain district of Madhya Pradesh. The study is based on primary data which has been collected from the Elected Women Representatives of various blocks of Ujjain district (as per 2009-10 panchayat elections) and also to explore, whether the women have been empowered after getting a 50% reservation at the grassroots level. This study has also revealed that after connecting with the panchayat whether the level of women's social status have increased or not and also analyse the impediments factors faced by the women in the working of panchayat.

Keywords: Women Empowerment and Panchayati Raj Institutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

'EMPOWERMENT' may be described as a process which helps people to assert their control over the factors which affect their lives. Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent discussion in matters that affect them. Women empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International women Conference in 1985 at Nairobi, which defined it as redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW) includes the following factors in its definition of women empowerment:

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the way in which these relations may be changed.
- Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.

Women Empowerment and Political Participation in India:

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and Programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development and then from Eighth Five Year Plan emphasis was shifted from development to empowerment.

The World Economic Forum has placed India in the 101st position among 136 countries in the 2013 edition of an annual report that makes a global assessment of the progress made in bridging the gender gap. But India has fared better in terms of the political empowerment of women. India's gender gap index was 0.655 on a zero to one scale, with zero denoting

inequality and one equality. India's position has improved marginally in recent years; after hovering between positions 114 and 112 between 2007 and 2011 it has now shot to the 101st position. But its best position so far was in 2006 - when it stood 98th. It was ranked 105th in 2012. It is in the political empowerment arena that India has scored strong, being ranked 9th. The political sub-index measures the gap between men and women at the apex of the political decision-making hierarchy in terms of the ratio of women to men in minister-level positions and in Parliament. Political system and decision making process is seen clearly in the changes incorporated in the Panchayati Raj Institution. In recently introduced Panchayati Raj Institution, the policy for reservation in favour of women has therefore, been thought as an important approach to maximize their participation in the local level. This would also develop the understanding of women regarding their duties and right about national welfare and its integrity and they will be able to contribute effectively along with their male counterparts. Women empowerment has been an ongoing debate in India and elsewhere. Indian women occupying a subordinate position to men need to be empowered to overcome social, political and economic discrimination. There were several attempts to improve the position of women after India got independence. The 73rd Amendment Act is a major step towards political empowerment of women through Panchayati Raj Institutions. This has resulted in the entry of large number of women into decision making bodies in the rural areas, who were otherwise home makers. Gender advocates argue that the extent that decentralization creates opportunities for women to exercise more control over design and provisions of services and the management of resources it may benefit. Good number of women competing with men in local politics, forwarding gender related agendas is looked as a way towards gender equity.

Objectives of the study:

The study is aimed to understand the following objectives, they are as follows;

1. To explore the socio-economic status of the rural women.
2. To find out the level of political awareness and participation among the rural women.
3. To trace out the problems faced by the women in participating in the gram panchayat.

Profile of Study:

Ujjain is a historical city of Central India, located in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh. Bounded by the holy waters of the Shipra River, it is considered as one of the seven major sites of Hindu pilgrimage. Ujjain is situated on the right bank of River bank or River Shipra. It is a very holy city for the Hindus a site for the triennial Kumbh Mela. According to Hindu scriptures, it was originally called Avantika. The district has an area of 6,091 km². The district is bounded by the districts of Shajapur on the northeast and east, Dewas to the southeast, Indore to the south, Dhar to the southwest, and Ratlam to the west and northwest. The district is part of Ujjain Division. The total geographical area of the district is 609100 hactres wherein only 3200hactre is the forest area. There are 07 Tehsils, 06 Development Blocks, in the district. Ujjain is the administrative headquarters of the district.

2. METHODOLOGY

For the present study, primary and secondary data were collected. The Woman Headed Panchayat Raj Representatives, were interviewed separately through the structured interview schedule. The interview schedule was based on rural women's attitude towards political awareness, political participation, their empowerment and impediments. Secondary data was collected from government agencies, civil society organisations interacting with Panchayati Raj Institutions and existing research studies. The main focus of this study is on the *Woman Headed Gram Panchayats* within the *Panchayati Raj* system in Madhya Pradesh. For the study, Ujjain district of Madhya Pradesh was selected to know about rural women's attitude towards political participation and their empowerment. In the Ujjain district, there are six Janpad Panchayats and from the six Janpad Panchayat only two Janpad Panchayats Badnagar and Mahidpur were purposely selected for the study. Three Woman Headed Gram Panchayats were chosen from each Janpad Panchayat. Thus, total six Woman Headed Gram Panchayats were selected for the in-depth study. From each selected Gram Panchayat five Woman Panchayat Raj Representatives, were taken for the study, Thus total 30 Women Panchayat Raj Representatives were the part of the sample.

Table 1 Age of Elected Women Representatives

S. No.	Age	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Up to 25	2	6.6
2.	26-35	8	26.6
3.	36-45	9	30.0
4.	46-55	4	13.3
5.	56 and above	7	23.3
Total		30	100.0

(Source: Computed from Primary Data)

The age-wise analysis of elected women representatives shows that 30.0 per cent are between 36-45, while around 26.6 per cent are in the 26-35 age group. 23.3 per cent of elected women representatives are in the category of 56 and above years of age and only 13.3 per cent are in the age group of up to 46-55 years. only 6.6 per cent of them are from up to 25 years age group. This clearly brings out a positive aspect of reservation policy for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions as it seems to have promoted the participation of women in grassroots politics and has also broken the traditional pattern of village elderly acquiring the leadership positions.

Table 2 Main Occupation of the Respondent's Family

S. No.	Occupation	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Agriculture	18	60.0
2.	Business	5	16.6
3.	Handcraft Maker	0	0.0
4.	Efficient Worker	7	23.3
Total		30	100.0

(Source: Computed from Primary Data)

Table 2 shows that 60 per cent family are engaged in agriculture work. 16.6 per cent family are in Business. Remaining 13.3 per cent of are efficient worker but none are engaged in Handcraft. Thus, it has clearly emerged out that moreover, the family occupation of the majority of the female representatives is found to be agriculture work.

Table 3 The Person who inspired you to participate in the election process

S. No.	Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Self Motivation	8	26.6
2.	As per the wish of husband/family/relatives	19	63.3
3.	As per the wish of Leaders of caste/community	3	10.0
4.	As per the wish of Political Parties	0	0.0
Total		30	100.0

(Source: Computed from Primary Data)

It has been clear from the table no. 3 that 63.3 per cent of women respondents inspired by their husband and family relatives to participate in the election process which is the good indication and rest 26.6 per cent of them were self motivated to participate in the panchayat election process. only 10 per cent of them were inspired by leaders of their cast and community.

Table 4 Having a knowledge about the following statements

S. No.	Category	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total (%)
1.	Know the importance of the presence of women in a meeting of GS	17 (56.6)	13 (43.3)	30 (100.0)
2.	Know about the Panchayat Raj Act (Adhiniyam)	22 (73.3)	8 (26.6)	30 (100.0)
3.	Know about the tiers of PRIs	24 (80)	6 (20)	30 (100.0)
4.	Know about the tenure/terms of the Panchayat	27 (90)	3 (10)	30 (100.0)
5.	Know about the reserved seats for women in the Panchayat	14 (46.6)	16 (53.3)	30 (100.0)
6.	Know about the necessary quorum of the meeting of GS	11 (36.6)	19 (63.3)	30 (100.0)
7.	Know about the necessary presence of women in the quorum of the meeting of GS	10 (33.3)	20 (66.6)	30 (100.0)
8.	Know about the meeting of GS held in the year	28 (93.3)	2 (13.3)	30 (100.0)

(Source: Computed from Primary Data)

As per the table 4 which shows that 56.6 per cent of EWRs know that it is important for women to availing their presence in the meeting of Gram Sabha. 73.3 per cent of them answered that they know about the Panchayat Raj Act. The Panchayati Raj Act aims to provide the three tiers system in Panchayat Raj, 80 per cent of them have answered right that there are three tiers in the PRIs. As we all know that panchayat election held regularly in every 5 years, 90 per cent of them given the right and 10 per cent of them have given the wrong answer regarding the terms of panchayat. Madhya Pradesh have already implemented 50% quota for women in the panchayati raj institutions. 53.3 per cent of EWRs have not the knowledge that they have 50% reserved seats in the panchayat. 63.3 per cent respondents do not know the required number of quorum of the meeting of GS. 66.6 per cent of EWRs do not know the necessary presence of women in the quorum of the meeting and only 33.3 per cent of them having the knowledge of it. So it is not a positive indication that many of the respondents don't know the factual information of the required quorum in the meeting of panchayat.

Table 5 At the meeting of GP, decisions have been taken by

S.No.	Decision Taken	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Unanimous	17	56.6
2.	As per the wish of Sarpanch	0	0.0
3.	As per the wish of all Panchayat representatives	5	16.6
4.	As per the majority	8	26.6
Total		30	100.0

According to the table 5 which reveal that 56.6 per cent of EWRs have answered that the Unanimously the decision have been taken in the meeting of GP, 26.6 per cent of them argued that the decision have been taken as per the majority of GP, 16.6 per cent of them saying that as per the wish of all the Panchayat representatives.

Table 6 Problems/Hurdles of women are facing in the meeting of GP/GS

S. No.	Problems/Hurdles	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total (%)
1.	Seating equal to man	22 (73.3)	8 (26.6)	30 (100.0)
2.	Not hearing the complaint of women in the meeting of GP	19 (63.3)	11 (36.6)	30 (100.0)
3.	Not able to participate in the process of decision	23 (76.6)	7 (23.3)	30 (100.0)
4.	<i>Purdah</i> during the meeting of GP/GS	26 (86.6)	4 (13.3)	30 (100.0)
5.	Noncooperation of Govt. Officers and staff	18 (60)	12 (40)	30 (100.0)
6.	Noncooperation of other EPRs	6 (20)	24 (80)	30 (100.0)

(Source: Computed from Primary Data)

Table 4.56 describe that women are facing many problems/hurdles in the working of the panchayat. Where 73.3 per cent of the EWRs agree with that women having the problem in seating equal to man and 26.6 per cent denied it. 63.3 per cent of them agree that they have the problem of not hearing the complaint of women in the meeting of GP. 76.6 per cent of them having a problem of not able to participate in the process of decision. 86.6 per cent women are saying they are facing the problem of *Purdah* while the function of panchayat. 60 per cent of EWRs having the problem of the noncooperation of the govt. officer and staff. 80 per cent of them having not problem of noncooperation of other EPRs and 20 per cent of them having this problem.

3. CONCLUSION

The present study is conducted to know the awareness level of rural women and their participation in the PRIs. The study has been conducted on 30 elected women representatives from the six gram panchayats of two janpad panchayats of Ujjain district. The study shows that still women are dependent on their husbands and other family members. They have less knowledge about the necessary presence of women in the quorum of the meeting of GS and awareness about the Panchayati Raj Act. Even elected women representatives have very less knowledge about the reservation of seats for women in Panchayats. Most of the respondents accepted that they facing the problem of purdah when they were in the meeting of gram panchayat/gram sabha. Social and mobility restrictions under purdah severely limit women's involvement in political decision making in government institutions and in the judiciary. Lack of mobility and discouragement from participating in political life means women cannot easily exercise their right to vote, run for political office, participate in trade unions, or participate in community level decision-making. Nearly half of the respondents still feel that they have not been able to participate in the decision making process of meeting of gram panchayat. Thus, both the negative as well as the positive features of women's participation and performance must be kept in mind to reduce their problems and strengthen their capacity to perform functions and roles in the panchayati raj institutions.

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