

Women's Political Participation and Representation in the Panchayats

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Abstract: As we all know that today, how the women are facing the various problem in the functioning of panchayats. After getting the reservation in the panchayats, they are still depending on their husband or other male members of their family. So for knowing the status of women in the all level of panchayats in India, this paper which based on the secondary data is deal with the political participation and representation of the rural women in the panchayats in India. The theoretical perspective of the evolution of the panchayati raj system in India and the journey of the women in the local governance has also been explained in the study. The analysis of the required reservation for women in the all level of the panchayats in India, is also done in the study and some necessary steps for empowering the women in the panchayat level are also suggested.

Keywords: Women; Panchayati Raj Institutions; Local Governance; Decentralisation and Political Participation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Rig Veda, one of India's oldest sacred books and historical source mentions about the existence of village communities across the sub-continent that were self-governing and serving as the main interface between the predominantly agrarian village economies and their higher authorities. Such councils or assemblies called "sabhas" slowly assumed the form of the "Panchayat" (an assembly of five respected elders). These panchayats in north and south India became the pivot of administration, the focus of social solidarity and the principal forum for the dispensation of justice and resolution of local disputes. During the medieval and Mughal periods, these characteristics of the village panchayats remained unchanged.

The Royal Commission on decentralisation said in 1907 that "it is most desirable, alike in the interests of decentralisation and in order to associate the people with the local tasks of administration, that an attempt should be made to constitute and develop village Panchayats for the administration of local village affairs". The Montague-Chelmsford reforms, 1919 brought local self-government as a provincial transferred subject, under the domain of Indian Ministers in the provinces. The provincial autonomy under the Government of India Act, 1935, introduced popularly elected governments in the provinces and these governments enacted legislations to further democratic institutions of local self government. There have been two divergent views on the place of village Panchayats in independent India and its new Constitution. Mahatma Gandhi favoured Village Swaraj, strengthening of village Panchayats and giving them centrality in local governance, but Ambedkar believed that the village represented regressive India, a source of oppression. Hence the new state had to build safeguards against such social oppression. The Panchayats and their organisation were therefore placed as Article 40 under the Directive Principles of State Policy in the new Constitution in 1950, which were not justifiable.

The Panchayats were a subject of study by a number of committees and study teams starting with the B. R. Mehta Committee recommends a three- tier Panchayati Raj structure. In 1986 the L. M. Singhvi Committee studied Panchayati Raj, and suggested that Gram Sabha be the base of a decentralised democracy and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) be viewed as institutions of self-governance which would actually facilitate participation of people in the process of

planning and development. It also recommended constitutional recognition of local self-government and the inclusion of a new chapter in the Constitution for this purpose. The 73rd Amendment included the Gram Sabha as the basis of the three-tier Panchayati Raj.

Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, introduced the 64th Amendment bill on local government on the 15th May, 1989 in the Parliament, but it failed to get the required support. A second attempt was made in September 1990 to pass the bill in the Parliament. The bill however was not even taken up for consideration. In September 1991, a fresh bill on Panchayati Raj was introduced by the Congress government under P. V Narasimha Rao, the then Prime Minister. It was passed in 1992 as the 73rd Amendment Act 1992 with minor modifications and came into force on 24th April, 1993. The 73rd Amendment Act is an attempt to restructure the Panchayati Raj to reach the grassroot level. The bill for the first time gave constitutional status to Panchayati Raj institutions and it became mandatory on all state governments to implement it. This Amendment brought about uniformity in structure, composition, powers and functions of panchayats. It gave impetus to Panchayati Raj to promote social and economic development and improvement in living conditions of rural India. The main criticism leveled against the Act is that these institutions are viewed as implementing agencies for developmental activities and that they are not given the status of decentralised political institutions. Criticism apart, the Act fulfilled the dream of constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions and the state governments brought new legislations to implement it. It has been explained at the beginning of a silent revolution. This Amendment for the first time in the history of Panchayati Raj Institutions gave opportunities for women in large numbers to enter local administration.

2. WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATS

The revival of Panchayat Raj through the 73rd Amendment was an exercise in democratic decentralisation in the face of uneven progress in organising and functioning of Panchayats in India. The move deepened democracy by bringing elected government structures of village to intermediate and district levels through the mandate in the Constitution, whereas the elected legislators are only at the national and state levels in the Constitution. It has also added 2.38 million elected representatives to 2,46, 690 Panchayats. These included 1.26 million women, who constituted 44.52 per cent of the total number of elected representatives. The reservations for women were its most important and historic provisions. With these new reservations, women were the major group of first time entrants to the revived, grassroots level self-governing political institutions.

As the Prime Minister said on 22 November, 2006 at the Conference of State Panchayats, *"I think it would be fair to say that there are now more women in India in positions of elective authority than in the rest of the world put together"*. He again reflected with pride in Indian women at the National Convention of Chairpersons of District and Intermediate Panchayats on 24th April 2008 when he said (in Hindi), *"Our great success in this field has been the number of women representatives that outnumber the sum total of elected representatives all over the world. Political and Social Empowerment of Indian Women is the greatest success of Panchayati Raj. It is unique in the world history and in modern era"*. Rajiv Gandhi while speaking on 15th May 1989 to explain the rationale for the mandate in having Panchayats under the Constitution, also mentioned the rationale for *"securing reservations for women so as to fully involve them in the management of Community Affairs"*. They were to be the agents and actors for the responsive administration, he was looking for. He explained it in his speech and gave three major reasons for reservation of 30 per cent seats for women. *"We propose the reservation in Panchayats at all levels of 30 per cent of the seats for women. There are three major reasons for which we believe this Constitutional innovation to be necessary. First, women constitute half the population and are involved in rather more than half the economic life of rural India...Second, the sound finance of the household has traditionally been the responsibility of the women. Financial discipline and fiscal responsibility are ingrained in the habits and outlook of the women of rural India...Third, it is the women of India, in their role as grandmothers and mothers, who have been the repository of the India's ancient culture and traditions...it is that strength of moral character which women will bring to the Panchayats."* There was no proposal in this bill for reservation in chairperson's positions or minimum one-third reservations which was finally included in the 73rd Amendment but it was a bold move for Indian women.

Women in India are much better represented in the Panchayati Raj Institutions as compared to the Parliament. As per the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, in 2008 the Gram Panchayats had 37.8% women members, the Intermediate Panchayats 37% women members and the District Panchayats 35.3% women members. The total representation of women in all three tiers of the Panchayat amounted to 36.87%. This seems to be a result of Article 243D of the Indian Constitution, mandating at

least 1/3rd of the seats in all tiers of the Panchayat. A further Amendment to the Article was proposed in 2009, increasing the reservation to 50%, but was not passed. Some states such as Bihar, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Kerala have already amended their legislation and reserved 50% of the seats for women. The State of Sikkim has also amended its legislation to reserve 40% seats for Women in Panchayats, but not all the states in India have adopted similar legislations.

Of the total 28 lakh elected Panchayat representatives, more than 10 lakh are estimated to be women. The data regarding the number of Panchayats and Elected Women Representatives in all the three tiers of Panchayats in States/UTs as on December 2006 is shown in the table no. 1. This table also contains the data relating to the distribution of reserved categories, i.e. SCs, STs & OBCs in States/UTs.

Table No. 1 No. of Panchayats and Elected Representatives in the Three tiers of Panchayats in States/UTs As on 01-12-2006
Panchayats at all levels

S. No.	State/UT	No. of Panchayats	Total for Panchayats at all levels: Numbers of elected representatives							
			General (Non-SC/ST categories)	SC No.	%	ST No.	%	Total	Women No.	%
State										
1.	Andhra Pradesh	22945	172136	34025	15.2	17842	8.0	224003	74019	33.0
2.	Arunachal Pradesh	1789	0	0	0.0	8260	100.0	8260	3183	38.5
3.	Assam	2431	23206	1344	5.3	886	3.5	25436	9903	38.9
4.	Bihar	9040	109767	19440	14.9	884	0.7	130091	70400	54.1
5.	Chattishgarh	9982	76013	17540	10.9	66833	41.7	160386	54102	33.7
6.	Goa	192	1500	0	0.0	0	0.0	1500	453	30.2
7.	Gujarat	14068	83982	7970	7.0	22235	19.5	114187	380668	33.3
8.	Haryana	6325	54508	14965	21.5	0	0.0	69473	24994	36.0
9.	Himachal Pradesh	3330	16793	8724	32.0	1753	6.4	27270	9128	33.5
10.	Jharkhand	3979	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
11.	Karnataka	5856	67920	17859	18.6	10311	10.7	96090	41210	42.9
12.	Kerala	1165	16246	2005	10.8	232	1.3	18483	6515	35.2
13.	Madhya Pradesh	23412	222836	61103	15.4	112938	28.5	396877	134368	33.9
14.	Maharashtra	28302	176877	25268	11.0	27565	12.0	229710	77118	33.6
15.	Manipur	169	16844	43	2.4	41	2.3	1768	646	36.5
16.	Orissa	6578	56576	16910	16.8	27376	27.1	100862	36086	35.8
17.	Punjab	12605	62680	28376	31.2	0	0.0	91056	31838	35.0
18.	Rajasthan	9457	73030	25364	21.2	21410	17.9	119804	42402	35.4
19.	Sikkim	170	639	57	5.7	309	30.7	1005	384	38.2
20.	Tamil Naidu	13031	91958	23653	20.3	877	0.8	116488	39364	33.8
21.	Tripura	540	3914	1509	26.3	310	5.4	5733	1986	34.6
22.	Uttar Pradesh	52890	578984	191950	24.9	727	0.1	771661	299025	38.8
23.	Uttrakhand	7335	44450	11077	19.3	1973	3.4	57500	21517	37.4
24.	West Bengal	3713	37277	17158	29.2	4314	7.3	58749	21428	36.5
Union Territories										
25.	A & N Islands	75	856	0	0.0	0	0.0	856	296	34.6
26.	Chandigarh	19	153	34	18.2	0	0.0	187	62	33.2
27.	D & N Haveli	12	7	3	2.4	115	92.0	125	49	39.2
28.	Daman & Diu	15	71	4	4.1	22	22.7	97	37	38.1
29.	Lakshadweep	11	1	0	0.0	100	99.0	101	38	37.6
30.	Puducherry	108	784	237	23.2	0	0.0	1021	370	36.2
	TOTAL	239544	1974848	526618	18.6	327313	11.6	2828779	1038989	36.7

Source: Data published in the State of Panchayat, A Mid-Term Review and Appraisal dated 22/11/2006

In Bihar, while 50 per cent of the Panchayat seats and leadership positions are reserved for women, roughly 55 per cent of elected seats at the Gram Panchayat level are occupied by women. In Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, the representation of women in Panchayats is nearly 34 per cent and in Karnataka, it is around 43 per cent. Very least representation of women in the panchayats, 30.2 per cent is in Goa. 38.8 per cent of women in occupied the elected seats in the panchayats of Uttar Pradesh. If we talk about the condition women in union territory than we found that 39.2 per cent of women have elected in the Dadar and Nagar Haveli and Only 33.2 per cent of women have been placed in the panchayats of Chandigarh. This takes the overall presence of women in Panchayats to approximately 36.7 per cent (as on 01.12.2006), thus changing the profile of rural leadership. Reservations of seats for women in local elections have been perhaps most significant political step taken by independent India to provide overdue political spaces for women. It also helped to give local development a much desired direction. In its own report(s) on Women in Panchayats, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has pointed highly commendable works by women elected representatives and highly condemnable resistances from local elites and bureaucracy. In its official documents, the government of India rightly feel proud on providing reservations to women and thus mothering silent social revolutions in villages and cities. The whole world accepts this fact and many countries have imitated Indian concepts of reservations for women. The data regarding the Number of Women Sarpanches in States are given in table no.2

Table No. 2 Data on the Number of Women Sarpanches in States

S. no.	Name of the State/UT	Provision in the State/UT Legislation	Number
1.	Andhra Pradesh	Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act 1994. Provision 1/3 rd of the seats are reserved for women Sarpanch.	7269 out of 21807 = 33.3%
2.	Arunachal Pradesh	1/3 rd of total seat of Sarpanches (GP) are reserved of Women Sarpanches.	647 Women Chairperson (GP) out of total 1779
3.	Chattishgarh	Chattishgarh Panchayati Raj (Amended) Act. 2008 reservation has been enhanced from 33% to 50% .	3282 Women Sarpanches
4.	Bihar	50% as per the Bihar Panchayati Raj Act 2006.	4013 Women Sarpanches
5.	Goa	Goa Panchayati Raj Act 1994.	72 out of 190=37.84%
6.	Gujarat	Provision of 1/3 rd reservation against total number of seats for Village Sarpanch in Gujarat Panchayat Act. 1993 vide Section 9, 10 & 11.	4565 out of 13693 elected Village Sarpanches (33.33%)
7.	Haryana	1/3 rd seats of the total seats are reserved for women to be elected as Sarpanches.	2108 seats are reserved for women against 6155 seats of Sarpanches (34.24%)
8.	Himachal Pradesh	1/3 rd seats of the total seats are reserved for women to be elected as Sarpanches.	1147 out of 3243=35.37%
9.	Kerala	33% as per the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act.	333 Women Sarpanches out of 999
10.	Madhya Pradesh	As per amendment in Madhya Pradesh Panchayat & Gram Swaraj Act. 1993, 50% reservation for women has been made in all three tiers of PRIs .	7707 Women Sarpanches
11.	Maharashtra	As per the reservation policy in Maharashtra State, 1/3 rd of the total number of offices of Sarpanches in the Panchayati Raj Institutions are reserved for Women candidates.	Out of 27909 Village Panchayats 9210 seats of Sarpanches are reserved for women. 9448 women are officiating. (33.85%)
12.	Manipur	Section 25 of the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act. 1994	60 women Sarpanches out of 165 (36%)
13.	Rajasthan	The Reservation for women to be elected as Sarpanches in the State of Rajasthan was 33% which has been increased to 50%.	37.89%
14.	Sikkim	40% seats are reserved for women. The state Govt. enhanced seat reservation from 33% to 40% in 2007 only. No proposal to enhance further.	65 women sarpanches in Sikkim out of 163 total Sarpanches (39.87%)
15.	Tripura	1/3 rd seats are reserved for women	219 Women Pradhans out of 511 Pradhans (Sarpanches)
16.	Uttarakhand	Up to 50% as per Uttar Pradesh Panchayat Raj Adhiniyam 1947.	3751 Women Sarpanches out of 7541
17.	West Bengal	Not less than 1/3 rd of the total number of offices of	_

		Sarpanches including the seats reserved for women.	
18.	Chandigarh	1/3 rd as per Punjab Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 (As applicable in Chandigarh).	4 Women Sarpanches
19.	Lakshadweep	Lakshadweep Panchayat Regulation, 1994 provides reservation of not less than 1/3 rd of seats in Panchayat for women	4 Women Sarpanches out of 10 Panchayats (40%)
20.	Puducherry	Section 11 (4) of the Pondicherry Village and Commune Panchayats Act 1973. Provided further that 1/3 rd of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women.	36 out of 98

Source: Data published in the State of Panchayat, A Mid-Term Review and Appraisal dated 22/11/2006

Table No. 3 State wise details of Multi Termer Elected Women Representatives for more than one term in Panchayats

S. No	Name of the State/UT	Tiers of Panchayati Raj System					
		Village Panchayat		Intermediate Panchayat		District Panchayat	
		No. of Women Representatives elected more than one	% Women representatives elected more than one term	No. of Women representatives elected more than one term	% Women representatives elected more than one term	No. of Women Representatives elected more than one	% Women representatives elected more than one term
1.	Andhra Pradesh	-	-	-	-	-	-
2.	Arunachal Pradesh	602	20	115	17	05	0.9
3.	Assam	-	-	-	-	-	-
4.	Bihar	-	-	-	-	-	-
5.	Chattishgarh	14426	27.50	229	25.22	29	27.62
6.	Goa	90	15.84	00	00	00	00
7.	Gujarat	-	-	-	-	-	-
8.	Haryana	433	1.76	7	0.68	5	2.66
9.	Himachal Pradesh	822	9.43	42	6.89	10	10.87
10.	Jharkhand	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
11.	Karnataka	1654	4.31	33	2.16	16	4.17
12.	Kerala	763	12.83	92	12.4	18	14.4
13.	Madhya Pradesh	1083	7.77	148	6.22	23	2.75
14.	Maharashtra	4543	8.62	100	8.80	62	11.27
15.	Manipur	35	4.79	Not Established in Manipur		2	6.89
16.	Orissa	-	-	-	-	-	-
17.	Punjab	2448	8.8	25	2.8	1	1
18.	Rajasthan	-	-	-	-	-	-
19.	Sikkim	42	4.71	There are only 2 tiers of Panchayats		3	3.15
20.	Tamil Naidu	-	-	-	-	-	-
21.	Tripura	-	-	-	-	-	-
22.	Uttar Pradesh	-	-	-	-	-	-
23.	Uttarakhand	551	2.98	41	3.74	126	4.76
24.	West Bengal	2858	17.64	777	23.47	127	42.62
Union Territories							
25.	A & N	12	4.27	3	8.82	Nil	Nil

	Islands						
26.	Chandigarh	9	26.4	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
27.	D & N Haveli	1	2.22	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
28.	Daman & Diu	1	2.94	Daman & Diu has no Intermediate level of Panchayats	1		14.28
29.	Lakshadweep	2	6.45	Lakshadweep has no Intermediate level of Panchayats	1		11.1
30.	Puducheery	Civic Elections of Union Territory of Puducherry was held in Jun-July, 2006 for the first time and the terms of Panchayats will likely to continue for 5 years from July, 2006 onwards as per the provisions under the Pondicherry Village and Commune Panchayat Act., 1973.					
<i>Source: Data published in the State of Panchayat, A Mid-Term Review and Appraisal dated 22/11/2006</i>							

In the table no. 3, which indicating that 14426 (27.50%) women representatives elected more than one term in the Village Panchayat in Chattishgarh where 229 (25.22 %) of them were elected in the Intermediate Panchayat more than one term and 29 (27.62 %) of them elected more than one term in the District Panchayat. Only 35 (4.79 %) of women representatives elected in the Village Panchayat of Manipur and 2 (6.89 %) of them elected in the District Panchayat.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, it can be said that the government of India is trying to empower the women through various political policies and programs but there are still some gaps to be bridged. The present study shows the reservation for women in the panchayats motivates them to come forward in the political field. In conclusion, it can be stated that the reservation for women can be an important impetus to women's empowerment in India on village level but that it is not a guarantee for the participation of the elected women. Steps are being taken to overcome these hindrances, but it is a very time-consuming process. There is a need to change many aspects of the existing gender relations, power distribution and to take hard decisions concerning power-sharing. In this respect it appears that Accordingly, a Bill to amend Article 243D to provide 50% reservation for women in seats and also offices of Chairpersons in all three tiers of Panchayats was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 26.11.2009. Presently, out of approx 28.18 lakh elected representatives of Panchayats, 36.87% (around 10 lakh) are women. With the proposed Constitutional Amendment, the number of elected women representatives (EWRs) is expected to rise to more than 14 lakh. A number of steps are necessary for empowerment of women, such as:

1. A provision of women's component plans in PRI budgets.
2. Linkages with SHGs in all levels of PRIs.
3. Adequate training and capacity building of EWR.
4. Leadership training programmes for EWRs.
5. Training of other functionaries on gender issues.
6. Peer-to-peer and horizontal learning from success stories.
7. Sharing good practices and exposure visits.
8. Political parties must put up women candidates.
9. Women candidates be given opportunity to serve a full term.
10. Mahila Sabhas be encouraged to facilitate women's concerns and be raised on priority basis in meetings of Gram /Ward Sabhas.
11. Separate quorum for women's participation in Gram/Ward Sabhas.

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