



Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions: A Sociological Study of Haryana, India

Vikas Nandal

M.D. University, Rohtak, Haryana, INDIA

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Abstract

The present study "Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions" conducted on the sample of 50 women respondents from village Anwali District Sonipat, Haryana, India. Stratified sampling technique was adopted for selecting the sample from different wards of the village. Interview Schedule was used to collect primary data from the respondents. Analysis revealed that the awareness and constitutional knowledge of women was not satisfactory. Participation level of women in Gram Panchayats only limited, only to remain as voter. Some of the women respondents even do not know the functioning of Gram Panchayat. In Gram Panchayat election their husband and family decided that to whom that have to give vote, women do not have their own choice.

Keywords: Women, panchayats, participation, awareness, governance, knowledge.

Introduction

Women constitute more or less than half of the population of any country. But their involvement in politics is insignificant compared to men. Many psychological, social and physical factors hold women back from active political involvement. This is true as far as the state and national level politics is concerned. A democratic country cannot progress if energies of its half population are concerned in the kitchen only. After attaining independence Indian constitution ensured gender equality through various provisions and regulations. It was presumed that these rights would automatically get translated into political development of the women in the country. The issue of women's participation in politics cannot be viewed in isolation from the general position of women in a society but despite their vast strength, women occupy a marginalized position in the political system¹.

This step was based on the premises that there can be no true democracy or no true people's participation in governance and development without equal participation of women in all spheres of life and at different levels of decision-making and then the goals of development cannot be fully realized without women's full and active participation not only in the development process but also in the shaping of its goals. It is well known that parliamentary democracy is the rule of majority and by ignoring nearly fifty per cent of women's population; no country can march towards attaining the goals of justice, liberty and equality under the socialist, egalitarian and democratic framework of India's Constitution².

Political status of women implies a degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in sharing of power and importance given by the society to the role of women in the political

system. The equality and active political participation are inseparable. Participation of women in political arena is integral to the advancement of women. Their political participation means not only using the right to vote, but also power-sharing, co-decision-making, and co-policy-making at all levels of governance of the State. Women's equal status in every sphere is inextricably linked to country's progress and development³.

Political participation of women in India has been neglected even since independence. Though our country has adopted democratic system of government and the women constitute 48.9 per cent of population of the country, but their political participation is very low. Due to various constraints they could not occupy the positions of power and assume leadership roles. Women's participation has been increasing rapidly but it is not satisfactory. They are also denying opportunities to participate in the administration, even in the making of decisions that affect their life and welfare. Though Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi had believed that women had a positive role to play in the reconstruction of society and the recognition of their equality was an essential step to bring about social justice. This added to the massive participation by the women in the freedom movement and had a direct impact on the political and social elite, including women. After independence, when the constitution was adopted women like Smt. Sarojini Naidu, Hansa Mehta, Renuka Roy, Durgabai Desmukh etc. took part in the constitution-making. In our Constitution there is guarantee of equality and dignity of the individual and it claimed the fundamental rights of women to political and legal equality and guaranteed non-discrimination in employment and office under the states. Our Constitution had provided many channels for the development and progress of the women. The preambles of the Constitution, the chapters of Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of the State Policies etc., are the specific objectives of

this purpose. These constitutional provisions are meant to empower 48.9 per cent women population in India. Many government and non-government agencies are working for the development of women but in practice we find a wide gap between the stated social objectives and achievements, between the legal framework and imperial realities, between the symbolism and actuality. And this is the reason that after these constitutional safeguards and legal frameworks, the participation is still very low. There are three indicators to assess the political participation of women. i. Participation in the political process as the voters and candidates in election. ii. Political attitudes such as awareness commitment and involvement in politics and autonomy in political action and behaviour. iii. Their impact on the political process.

The credit goes to Narsimha Rao government when 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992 Panchayati Raj Act, which not only, provided autonomy to the grassroots but it also provided reservation of one-third of seats for women in every Panchayat and municipality, not less than one-third seats shall be reserved for women belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. This may be allotted by rotation from the constituency to constituency. Till the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Amendments no one was sure about the role to be played by the women in the process of development of the society and women themselves.

Since the PRIs have potential to start the process of women empowerment from the village level, it can change the social scenario of the village. The PRIs provide village women, the opportunities for leadership and to take part directly in the decision making in the process of development. It will also help in managing the violence against women. So the following factors had attracted to take the problem of women empowerment through PRIs for this work. These are: i. To create a healthy environment to exercise women's rights equal with men in rural areas. ii. For equal participation of women in decision making bodies for their development and welfare. iii. To prepare women for political participation in Parliament and Assemblies also with 33 per cent reservation. iv. To adopt an integrated approach for empowering women through effective convergence of the services, resources, structures and man power in related sectors. v. To organise women into groups as self help groups for economic empowerment of rural areas. vi. To generate political awareness and political participation in village politics by women through PRIs.

Constitutional provisions: The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters

relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard.

Constitutional Privileges: i. Equality before law for women (Article 14), ii. The State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15 (i)), iii. The State to make any special provision in favour of women and children (Article 15 (3)), iv. Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State (Article 16), v. The State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)); and equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)), vi. To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities (Article 39 A), vii. The State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42), viii. The State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46), ix. The State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people (Article 47), x. To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)) xi. 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 to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat (Article 243 D(3)), xii. Not less than one-third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women (Article 243 D (4)), xiii. 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 to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality (Article 243 T (3)), xiv. Reservation of offices of Chairpersons in Municipalities for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the legislature of a State may by law provide (Article 243 T (4)).

Objectives of the study: In the present study, the emphasis is given to study women's participation in panchayats. To understand this phenomena, the investigator has formulated the following objectives: i. To study the socio-economic background of the respondents, ii. To know the awareness and constitutional knowledge of women in PRI's.

Methodology

For the present study, both primary and secondary data was used. Primary data which was the base of our study was collected by interview schedule. In order to select the respondents from the different wards of the village Stratified Random Sampling method was used. The data was collected by the investigator from field. Simple statistical tools were used in the while tabulation and analyse of the data. Secondary data was collected from various government records and other sources.

An interview schedule was framed to collect the primary data. Village Anwali was divided in 14 wards. As our study was on micro level, so out of 14 wards, 50 respondents were analyzed, 25 respondents from each ward. Here, random sampling method has been adopted for the selection of sample respondents. To understand the socio-economic background of respondents we would analysis the age, education, caste, family type, family size, family income, of the respondents.

Table-1
Age wise classification of Respondents

| Age Group | Number | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|--------|----------------|
| Young Age (18-31) | 33 | 66% |
| Middle Age (32-50) | 14 | 28% |
| Aged (Above 50) | 03 | 06% |
| Total | 50 | 100% |

(Sources: Computed from primary data)

The table 1 presents the age wise classification of the respondents. A perusal of the table reveals that out of total sample of 50 female respondents (66 per cent) belonged to 18-31 years of age group, 28 per cent belonged to 32-50 years of age group. Only 06 per cent respondents were from the age group of above 50 years.

Table-2
Distribution of the Respondents on the basis of their caste

| Caste | Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------|-------------|----------------|
| Upper caste | 29 | 58% |
| Scheduled caste | 13 | 26% |
| Other Backward caste | 08 | 16% |
| Total | 50 | 100% |

(Sources: Computed from primary data)

Table 2, shows that out of the total sample of 50 respondent's majority of women 29 per cent were from upper caste, followed by Scheduled caste 26 per cent and other backward caste 06 per cent. So caste system does not affect the participation.

Table-3
Educational Qualification of the Respondents

| Educational Qualification | Number | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------|--------|----------------|
| Illiterate | 03 | 06% |
| Matric | 17 | 34% |
| Senior Secondary | 14 | 28% |
| Graduate | 13 | 26% |
| Post-Graduate | 05 | 10% |
| Total | 50 | 100% |

(Sources: Computed from primary data)

The table 3 depicts that majority of our respondents 34 per cent were matric passed. 14 per cent were studied up to senior secondary level. Followed by graduate level 13 per cent and 10 per cent respondents were Post-graduate and only 06 per cent women were illiterate. Education level was very low in this area. Education is essential to bring awareness in the respondents in context to PRI's.

Table-4
Sources of Income of the Respondent's Family

| Occupation | Number | Percentage (%) |
|-------------|--------|----------------|
| Agriculture | 24 | 48% |
| Govt. Job | 07 | 14% |
| Private Job | 06 | 12% |
| Other | 13 | 26% |
| Total | 50 | 100% |

(Sources: Computed from primary data)

Table 4 show that majority 48 per cent of women respondent's family were engaged in agriculture for livelihood, followed by 14 per cent respondent's family in Govt. job and after that 12 per cent and 26 per cent respondent's family were engaged in private job and other works respectively.

Table-5
Awareness level of the Respondents about the Panchayati Raj

| SI NO. | Awareness | Respondents saying 'yes' | Percentage (%) |
|--------|---|--------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Knowledge of Panchayati Raj Act 73 rd Amendment | 19 | 38% |
| 2 | Sources of Income of Panchayats | 13 | 26% |
| 3 | Power & Works of Panchayats | 15 | 15% |
| 4 | Seats reserved for women in PRI's, Assemblies & Parliament? | 21 | 21% |

(Sources: Computed from primary data)

Table 5 shows that respondents have very less awareness about the Panchayati Raj Institution. They have very little knowledge about the Panchayati Raj Act 73rd Amendment, power and works of the Gram Panchayats, sources of income of Gram Panchayats and reservation of seats PRI's, assemblies and parliament. So we found less awareness of the respondents about various issues of PRI's and constitutional bodies.

Table-6
Mode of Electoral Participation of Women in Panchayat Election

| SI. NO. | Participation | No. of respondents Saying 'yes' | Percentage (%) |
|---------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | As a Voter | 30 | 60% |
| 2 | Supporter of political Party | 15 | 30% |
| 3 | As a campaigner | 05 | 10% |
| 4 | As a Candidate | 00 | 00 |
| | Total | 50 | 100% |

(Sources: Computed from primary data)

Table 6 shows that majority of respondents participate in the election as voter 30 per cent respondents participated to support any political party. Only 10 per cent respondents participated as a campaigner in the Panchayats election. When the questions were asked from the respondents about their own choice, interestingly, most of their response show that they casted their vote which was decided by their husband. Rather they only know the symbol of the political party which was tell by their husband.

Findings: i. When we analyze all the data collected from the respondents, we found that majority of respondents participate in the electoral process as voter. ii. From this study we found that respondents have very less awareness about the Panchayati Raj Act 73rd Amendment. They know that every village have a Panchayat which works for the development for the village but they do not know the various power, works etc. of the Panchayats. iii. They have a very little knowledge about the reservation of seats for women in Gram Panchayats. iv. During this survey we found that most of our respondents cast their vote to that candidate whom their husband chooses. Even they do not have that right to cast their vote for their own choice.

Conclusion

The present study entitled "Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions" is a study conducted to know the awareness and constitutional knowledge of women in PRI's. The study has been conducted on 50 women respondents in

village Anwali District Sonipat Haryana. The study shows that participation of women in the affairs of Panchayat Elections is not up to mark. They have less awareness about the Panchayati Raj Act 73rd Amendment and the working of gram Panchayats. Even Our respondents have very less knowledge about the reservation of seats for women in Panchayats, Assemblies and Parliament. Our respondents also don't know about the various sources of the gram Panchayats. So, in the light of the above analysis, it is quite obvious that a number of reasons like illiteracy, poverty, traditional family values and pattern of society, male dominance society etc. are responsible for their less participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

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