



## FACTORS AFFECTING THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN PRATAPGARH DISTRICT OF UTTAR PRADESH

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**ABSTRACT** Around seventy percent of total female population of women in India live in rural areas. Women empowerment, gender mainstreaming, women's participation in political domain has been gaining wider acceptance, especially in the last two decades. After Seventy Third Amendment Act, women's participation in local bodies has become not only become a consideration for equality but also sustainable economic and social development. The participation of women in the Panchayati Raj is essential not only for ensuring political participation in the democratic process but also for rising development goals for women. This paper discusses the personal and social factors which impact the performance of women's participation in local bodies.

**KEYWORDS :** Panchayati Raj, Women's Participation, 73rd Amendment Act.

### Introduction

The concept of women empowerment is a process as well as an outcome. Enactment of Seventy Third Constitutional Amendment Act with the provision of 33% reservation of seats for women at Panchayat level has been seen a leap forward towards women empowerment. The term 'Empowerment' deal with 'power' and 'being powerful', a power which entails process of change.

'In this process, women should have ability to make strategic choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. The three dimensions are important: resources (pre-conditions), agency (process) and achievement (outcomes). The resources include human, social, and economic resources that enhance the ability to exercise the choices. The second dimension of power relates to agency- the ability to define one's goals and act upon them.'<sup>1</sup>

As far as empowerment is concerned, we are interested in possible *inequalities* in peoples' capacities to make choices rather than *differences* in the choices they make.<sup>2</sup> Going beyond the concerns with basic survival related achievements (proper nourishment, good health and adequate shelter all constitute primary functioning which tends to be universally valued) other complex functioning achievement such as political achievement to be valued, as per UNDP's gender disaggregated Human development Index as well as Gender Empowerment Index.<sup>3</sup>

Empowerment of women is not only a matter of consideration for equality and equity in the society but also a pre condition for sustainable social and economic condition. Similarly, participation of women in Panchayati Raj is not solely about women's participation in politics at grass root level but also raising development goals for women in public as well as private sphere. After the enactment of Seventy Third Amendment Act, there are more than 1,000,000 women holding the offices in different tier of the local government.

Uttar Pradesh is one of the pioneer states in the country, immediately after independence through the enactment of the UP Panchayat Raj Act, 1947 the Panchayati raj system was introduced in the state. Following the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 in order to bring about conformity with the provisions of the Constitution, the Government of U.P. amended the two Acts (U.P. Kshetra Samitis and Zilla Parishads Act, 1961(now, renamed as UP Kshetra panchayats and Zilla Panchayats Adhiniyam, 1961), through the Uttar Pradesh Panchayat Laws (Amendment) Act, 1994.<sup>4</sup>

After delimitation, with new addition total number of gram Panchayats is slightly over 53,000.<sup>5</sup> As per 2011 census there were 52,000 gram Panchayats. Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of women sarpanches at 19,992 but only 34% of total sarpanches.<sup>6</sup> So there is a great need to have a deeper understanding of the factors affecting the performance of women in Panchayati Raj Institutes.

This study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To study social, economic and personal variables of women Panchayat members.
2. To ascertain the impact of personal variables with the performance

level of women panchayat members.

### Methodology

The study was conducted in Pratapgarh district of Uttar Pradesh which is comprised of seventeen blocks, out of which Sandawa Chandika block was selected. The selection of sample areas was based on a number of factors, both theoretical and practical. Economic distribution of rural population is characterized by a high degree of inequality. According to statistic data, Sandawa Chandika is an average performing block among 17 blocks of Pratapgarh district. In this way, this block resembles an average situation pertaining to women's participation in the district. There are sixty six gram panchayats in Sandawa Chandika block where twenty eight women sarpanches have been elected. All the gram Panchayats with women representatives were selected from identified block. Along with that, ex- women gram Panchayat pradhan were also interviewed. Thus twenty eight Elected Women Representatives and seven women representatives from previous generation of elections, totalling thirty five, were identified for the study. Thereafter relevant information was collected from respondents with the help of an interview schedule developed through the face to face contact method. Data were then analysed and tabulated and results were interpreted in the light of the study's objectives.

### Results and Discussion

Social and personal variables selected for the study are discussed below:

#### Age

The result reveals that majority of women representatives were from the young age category (48%) followed by middle age category (40%). And 12% were from 51 and above category. Between 21-35 age group were the women who are either daughter-in- law and in most of the cases mothers of one child or two or more children. Women of 36 years or above were head (female) of the family. They generally had the supervisory job over daughter(s) and daughter-in-law(s). They take care of tasks other than kitchen and household chores. They go out, meet people and have respectable position among villagers as they are considered respected and experienced ones in the village.

#### Caste

Caste being one of the important features of closed society plays a significant role in promoting and controlling certain behavioral patterns, hence may prove functional or dysfunctional for its constituent groups. Govind sahay Committee constituted in 1958 in Uttar Pradesh stated that panchayats are still afflicted with negative aspects of caste. This observation of the Committee still seems real in local bodies. Caste division and its implications in Uttar Pradesh is itself a big question to be answered. Though Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of SC population. The table shows SC with 16% representation in Panchayat and 24% sarpanch from Other Backward Caste (OBC). In the rural areas, influence of upper caste can be seen easily, majority of women sarpanch were belonged to upper caste (52%). It is not the same all the time. Official data shows that reserved seat for Schedules caste or Backward caste based on rotation basis has challenged the prevailing strong feeling.

**Table 1: Information based on interview of respondents**

S.No	Categories	Variables	Elected Women representatives (%)
1	Age	21-35 yrs	48
		36-50 yrs	40
		51 and above	12
2	Caste	general	52
		OBC	24
		SC	16
		ST	0
3	Religion	Hindu	92
		Muslim	8
		Others	0
4	Education	Illiterate	4
		Literate	20
		primary	28
		8th/10th	32
		intermediate	8
		graduate	8
5	Marital Status	married	100
		unmarried	0
		divorce	0
		widow	0
6	Occupation	house wife	60
		farmer	32
		agri-labour	8
		job/business	0
7	Economic status	<20,000	92
		20,001-30,000	8
		30,001-40,000	0
		40,001-50,000	0
8	Political Experience	1-5 yrs	92
		6-10yrs	8
		11-15 yrs	0
		16& above	0
9	Social Participation	1-5 yrs	72
		6-10yrs	16
		11-15 yrs	4
		No experience	0

### Religion

Religion of respondents provides a kaleidoscope of society's rich collection of social composition. Majority of respondents (92%) belonged to Hindu religion. Only 8% women representatives were from Muslim community. While no representatives were from other communities. This area is dominated by Hindus. It has shown that among Hindus, caste further divides horizontally and vertically.

### Education

Literacy rate in India has always been a concern for policy makers. Without literacy, growth and development cannot be achieved to its fullest. Though enrolment in primary schools has increased in current census and female literacy rate has also increased by 15% in comparison to male literacy rate but female literacy rate is still very low. Census shows the result of 58.45% and 81.88% literacy of female and Male in the district respectively.

The data of Table 1 depicts that majority of Sarpanches were educated to intermediate level (32%), followed by primary level (28%), and only 4% were illiterate. While 20% respondents had never been to school but they knew how to write their names. Among respondents, there were women Pradhans who were illiterate but knew how to sign their names. They were addressed as 'literate' in the options provided in the interview schedule. This can be seen as a sign of improvement in position of women because to maintain their image, family members taught them how to sign.

### Marital Status

In Indian society, family is a unit of society and marriage is one of the most important institutions within the social system. Married women are considered as respected woman. They are honoured in social space. It has been observed during interview and data collection in the Sandawa Chandika block in district Pratapgarh that all the respondents were married. None were unmarried; divorcee or under any condition

that can be categorized under any other status; for example, single women.

### Occupation and Economic status

Pratapgarh is an agrarian district. Amla fruit based small and medium industry is rampant in district as Pratapgarh is top producer of Amla fruit. People are dependent on agriculture and small business as general store and similar kind of work in rural areas. Majority of respondents (60%) were house wives. 32% described themselves as farmers. In the entire gram Panchayats, there were no women pradhan who were involved in jobs or businesses.

Economic status indicates towards the fact as to which class is representing the mass, what percentages of people belonging to different categories come and get elected in the Panchayat. The majority of women representatives belonged to the income group below 20,000rs as annual income (92%) followed by medium income group i.e. between 20,000-30,000 (8%). Not a single respondent belonged to the high Income group.

Here, with help of data, interpretation can be drawn that lower class is coming into power. Here the researcher wants to put her observation from the field. In rural areas, many female Pradhans had big homes, modern facilities and earning sources, but they preferred to be kept under the first category.

### Political experience

With 33% reservation, women have got mandatory presence in the political domain at the local level. And interestingly, not only selected area for study but other local bodies too have more than 40% women representatives in Panchayats and Municipalities. Now number of women elected for the second term is increasing and they are also contesting on non reserved seats. But women leaders still do not have equal say in decision making. Majority of the women representatives has contested election for the first time (92%). Only 8% respondents were belonged to second generation of Panchayat Raj elections.

The reason cited by majority of the respondents from both Panchayat Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies for participating in election and entering into politics was the declaration of reserved seats in their constituencies. However, they said that now this trend was changing. In Sandawa Chandika block there were around 30% women elected on unreserved seats in all the categories. But ability of a female candidate to be successful in elections is conditioned by the male family members of the women candidate. 8% Pradhans were in their second term as representative.

### Social participation

Politics in itself is an action of delivering services to people at their doorstep. For respondents, answer of this question and previous one (political experience) were similar. For them both the questions was asking about the same thing. The majority of women representatives were active in social life and services (72%) followed by respondents who had been active in last 5-10 years (16%). And 8% were found in the category of 10-15 years of social participation experience. However, only 4% were members of any organization.

In village, all the respondents said that they were in social work but when researcher asked them whether they prefer going outside to help others beyond their position as a Pradhan or after their tenure ends, will they continue to serve society? All of them denied by giving more or less similar excuses that their husbands are more active and they can't move freely in Panchayat and village.

### Conclusion

Caste is still prevailing factor in Panchayat and plays important role in local politics. Local leaders, influential people control power even in times of reserved seats for women or SC.

Education has positive impact on women's effective participation in Panchayat and Gram Sabha. Women representatives, who have learnt how to sign because of exposure in political sphere, are taking a step forward for next generation girls' education. They develop informed and rational say in matters of proxy representation, women's low presence in political parties, elitism and politics of winnability of certain caste and development issues. Economic independence in such closed society is way far from empowering women economically. Though, women who were farmers or land holders had more in family

matters, if not public issues.

It can be concluded that age, occupation, education, social participation have positive impact on women representatives. As young aged women representatives can use knowledge better than middle aged women. They have more chances of further growth and development in politics at higher level and they can cooperate better in training and learning new technology.

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