

An Overview of Issues and Challenges for Women Sarpanch at Gramapanchayat

Dr. Thippeswamy S

Assistant Professor, Sidhartha Law College, Kalaburgi, Karnataka State

“For me, a better democracy is a democracy where woman do not only have the right to vote and to elect but to be elected” - Michelle Bachelet,

Abstract:

Women have an important role in the development and growth of a nation. They are vital for the progress of a civilized society. Without the development of women, it is impossible to envisage the growth of people, families, and society. According to the 73rd Amendment, women must hold at least one-third of the seats in panchayat. With 1.4 million elected female seats, India has the most. Panchayat Raj Institutions have experienced both remarkable success and failure along the 26-year journey to establish genuine women's political representation at the grassroots level of democracy. Due to a number of obstacles, including a lack of awareness, experience, knowledge, talent, leadership quality, low level of education, lack of exposure, etc., it has been unable to provide better governance under the leadership of women representatives across India. Rather, data indicated that the biggest obstacles to women sarpanches performing their role at the village level were lack of experience as leaders, lack of funding from the government for development work, lack of training for women sarpanches, and delays in sanction and permission for development work from the upper level. The chapter attempts to address the problems and challenges faced by women sarpanches in along with potential government initiatives aimed at boosting female involvement in panchayat activities.

Keywords: Women Sarpanch, Panchayat Raj Institution, Issues and Challenges.

I. Introduction:

In India, women are changing the nature of governance. Positive outcomes have been obtained from women's greater political participation. PRI's activities prioritise development concerns like education, health, nutrition, and an increase in family income. Women representatives have demonstrated that they are informed about critical community resources, pick up on effective community-centred development fast, have a propensity to be more inclusive, and are adept at managing funds. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, among other things, reserved 33% of seats and significant positions for women in order to give the people authority over government at the panchayat level in 1993. It may be stated that since women's participation in panchayats is now gradually but definitely having an impact on grassroots government, the foundation has been set to this social revolution to expand to all levels of decision-making. Perhaps the most important feature of women entering provincial politics is the fact that many social myths are beginning to be debunked.

Women are also making substantial contributions in these areas, such as boosting educational standards and addressing issues with water sanitation and fuel, which were typically not acknowledged by men. However, the elected female representatives are viewed as "puppets" in the Panchayat Raj Institutions despite their representation. Rarely do women work in Panchayat Raj institutions, and the majority of them observe Panchayat meetings in silence. The following internal factors are known to have an effect on women's empowerment and participation processes: low levels of education, exposure, knowledge, skills, and leadership quality; lack of awareness; etc., external elements such as patriarchy, caste, societal attitude, and family influence women's participation and empowerment processes. More precisely, the majority of women and SC/ST members had to deal with the official, upper caste/dominant parts of their Gramapanchayat lack of collaboration. The majority of elected female Sarpanchs are viewed as little more than "Rubber Stamps," and their husbands or other prominent members of the neighbourhood perform all Panchayat functions.

The main obstacles that women sarpanches faced in performing their duties at the village level were shows demonstrating various challenges faced by working women representatives at the grama-panchayat level. These issues included a lack of government funding for development work, a lack of training for women sarpanches, delays in upper-level sanction and permission for development work, and a lack of leadership experience. Reservations by themselves are unable to continue this democratic process, even though they have strengthened the standing of women in PRIs.

II. Objectives of research paper

The objective of the research paper intended to identify the women sarpanches at the panchayat level who were having difficulties performing their duties and exercising their power in the Panchat Raj System. Two objectives have been established for the comprehensive review of this research paper:

1. Analysing increasing women's participation and facing challenges and difficulties in Panchayat Raj intuitions.
2. To study, the government has taken initiatives for women's participation and involvement at the grama-panchayat level.

III. Research methodology

The entire research paper is purely based on secondary sources of data. For the purpose of completing the research paper, I took data as a sample from a research survey conducted by one of the researchers through their personal interview in Dahod District of Gujarat State. Along with other books, articles, journals, websites, and the annual report of Panchayt Raj Intuitions, The method of research paper is descriptive, analytical method has been used for the analysis of various facts.

IV. Women and Panchayati Raj Institutions

The Rig Veda speaks about Sabha and Samiti, assemblies of village elders who helped the Rajan in formulating policies. The scriptures mention women joining their husbands or wives on these Sabhas as well. The settlements were always independent and locally run in later periods, as would be seen in the future. Despite the fact that the Uttaramerur inscription describes the Chola village administration, there is no concrete evidence that women participated at these meetings. The Panch system persisted in Indian villages for the longest period of time, and local, hereditary officials headed the revenue system;

nonetheless, the modern concept of local self-government emerged only when the British Raj was introduced in India.

Lord Ripon's Resolution launched financial decentralisation in 1882 and gave local bodies' additional authority. The Royal Commission on Decentralisation recommended granting village panchayats control over minor courts in 1908. The Women's Indian Association was founded in 1917 with the primary goal of promoting women's suffrage in the local, provincial, and central administrations. This marked the beginning of women's involvement with PRIs. The first princely state to allow women to vote in local elections was Travancore-Cochi. Madras was the first British province to allow women to vote in local body elections in 1921. Within months, Bombay and the United Provinces also allowed women to vote. The Government of India Act of 1935 defined the taxation relationships between local governments and the provinces and granted the latter greater autonomy.

The constitution of India included the establishment of village panchayats as one of the guiding principles of state policy in the post-independence era. Rajasthan was the first state to do so in 1959. The 73rd constitutional amendment, which included provisions for reserving 33% of seats in village panchayats for women as well as the offices of chairpersons, was passed in 1992, making it a significant year. The Union Cabinet's approval of a 50% reservation for women in local self-government entities in 2009 marked the next significant advancement. In order to create an effective plan for the participation of women in Gram- Panchayats and the empowering of such institutions, it is necessary to understand the present socio-political environment. The percentage of women elected to local self-government institutions (PRIs) increased to 46.14% of all elected members following the federal government's 2009 acceptance of a 50% reservation of seats for female candidates. To understand the circumstances in which these representatives operate, the policies that are important to them, and the work they would like to undertake, we must look well beyond this façade. **Table No. 1** indicates the institution-wise number of women elected representatives in panchayat Raj institutions across the country, during the year 2021-22

Total No. 1 No of women representative elected 2021-22

Name of the Office of Panchayati Raj Institutions	Total Number of Seats	Number of Seats Elections withhold	Number of Seats Elections held	Number of Women Representative Elected
Zila Parishad Territorial Constituency	660	8	652	353
Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituency	10047	344	9703	5670
Sarpanch Gram Panchayat	13371	274	13097	7434
Ward member Gram Panchayat	134057	3095	130962	72177
Total	158135	3721	154414	85634

Source: <https://data.gov.in/resource/institutions-wise-number-elected-women-representatives-panchayati-raj-institutions-pris>.

Examples of notable roles of women representatives in Panchayati institutions:

Undoubtedly, a few women representatives have taken everyone by surprise by demonstrating outstanding performance through the Panchayat institutions; a few notable instances are showcased below.

- **Miss Chavis Ranavat (Village-Soda, District Tonk, Rajasthan):** This woman, the sarpanch, has developed her village's roads, toilets, solar energy centres, water supply centres, and banks, achieving new heights of development.
- **Miss Aarti Devi (District-Ganjam, Orissa):** Being the youngest sarpanch in the country, she resigned her job as an officer at a bank to focus on rural development and was successful in achieving 100% literacy in her community.
- **Miss Meena Bahan (District Vyara, Gujrat)** She holds the honour of being this district's first female sarpanch. She formed a self-help group, encouraged strong female participation in it, and given most of the village's women financial independence.
- **Vijaynagaram District:** Under the direction of the district collector, the aim for this district was to construct 10,000 toilets in 100 hours; however, only 10449 toilets were constructed. Male and female Panchayati representatives from this district, along with UNESCO activists and volunteer organisations, were instrumental in this initiative.

V. Issues And challenges of women sarpanch at grampanchayat

With the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, the Panchayat Raj Institutions have played a vital role in economic and social growth, empowering women, and participation, with notable advancements in grassroots democracy and local development. While performing their duties for the construction of work, resolving issues that help the village people, and implementing schemes and programmes, women sarpanches encounter a number of difficulties, including financial dependence, capacity building, administrative interference, persistent social biases, a lack of knowledge, training, leadership ability, cooperation, etc. Four categories economic, technical, administrative, personal, and socio-psychological were used to group together the various issues and difficulties the women sarpanch encountered while carrying out their duties. Data collected through personal interviews by the researcher was ranked on the basis of frequencies and percentages. The data with regards to the problems and challenges is presented,

Table No. 2 Problems and challenges faced by women Sarpanches

Problems and challenges faced by women Sarpanches				
Sr. No.	Problems	Frequencies	Percept %	Rank
I. Economic				
1.	Lack of funds from government	83	94.31	I
2.	Lack of honorarium to women sarpanches working at village level	63	71.59	II
3.	No work is initiated without giving bribe	25	28.25	III
II. Technical				
1.	Lack of training to women sarpanchs.	78	88.63	I
2.	Lack of knowledge regarding PRS and development programmes.	54	61.36	II

3.	Lack of information regarding different rural development programmes.	44	45.00	III
III. Administrative				
1.	Delay in sanctions and permission for development work from upper level.	62	70.45	I
2.	Lack of administrative and financial power to women sarpanches.	40	45.45	II
3.	Lack of communication media at village level.	35	39.77	III
4.	Lack of co-operation from VLW and talati to women sarpanches	30	34.09	IV
5.	Lack of any type of protection to women sarpanches.	29	32.29	V
6.	Women sarpanches could not work freely, she has to work what her husband says	27	30.68	VI
7.	Lack of discipline in gents members at panchayat office.	22	25.00	VII
8.	Groupism in gram sabha stopped the development of village.	15	17.07	VIII
9.	Lack of staff in village panchayat office.	10	11.36	IX
IV. Personal, Social and Psychological				
1.	Lack of experience as leader	60	68.18	I
2.	Low level of education	52	59.09	II
3.	Lack of people's interest in developmental work.	45	51.13	III
4.	Difficulties in expressing the village Problems to upper level authorities.	30	34.09	IV
5.	Lack of co-operation and unity among elected members.	21	23.86	V
6.	Difficulties to go alone in the meeting outside the village.	16	18.18	VI

Source: Data taken from Dahod District of Gujarat State,

VI. Educational status of women sarpanch

The information collected by the researcher indicates that out of 30 sample women, 17 (56.66%) are illiterate, and the educational status of 13 (43.33%) respondents is primary school. The educational status of the sample of female representatives is very low. They have participated in the election out of their own interest. They have come to participate in the Panchayat Raj election in persuasion of either a family member or a local leader.

Table No. 3. Educational Status of Sample Respondents (Women representative)

Educational Qualification	Distribution of Respondents Percentage	Percentage
Illiterate	17	56.66
Primary	13	43.33

Secondary	Nil	Nil
Higher	Nil	Nil
Total	30	99.99

VII. Suggestions:

The following are some suggestions for the better involvement of women. Panchayati Raj institutions for the betterment as well as the progress of the state.

1. Particularly, the majority of rural women are low- or illiterate readers and new participants. They are unaware of the Panchayat office's procedure, rules, and regulations, as well as the various initiatives for development that are run by the Panchayat. The tenure of five years expires after knowing the entire process on a rotational basis for reservations, and it moves on to the next. In order to give them more time to understand the system and build confidence among one another so they can participate in the decision-making process, the period should be extended.
2. The change of both men's and women's attitudes is an essential requirement for the empowerment of rural women. Male members of society believe that women should be used for domestic work and caring for children and their needs. This mentality needs to be replaced with one of equal partnership in society between men and women.
3. The female leaders should be involved in interaction programmes that are scheduled periodically. To interact with urban female representatives, they should be exposed to urban environments. It's important to encourage successful female leaders to promote their leadership qualities and abilities. The government should to honour them at meetings held in rural areas. It will encourage other representatives for rural women.
4. From the Gram-Panchayat to the Zilla Parishad, attendance at panchayat meetings needs to be mandatory. Ensuring attendance at the panchayati meeting in order to help rural women develop leadership abilities and sense of self.
5. The National Literacy Mission and other institutions involved in the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan should also be given responsibility for educating rural men and women about the importance of Panchayati Raj and the empowerment of women.
6. They should to collaborate with regional NGOs, especially those dedicated to empowering women. Which government should to offer them financial assistance and infrastructure facilities. The state's most prominent supporters of women's rights might take on this duty. They can also offer the assistance rural women need to become more sensitive.
7. Rural women can be strongly encouraged to engage in the Panchayat Raj System by both print and electronic media. By fostering the values of gender equality and gender justice, they can serve as political socialisation agents.
8. Without the interference of male members, women should be free to choose the appropriate roles for themselves. Meetings by proxy on behalf of female representatives should not be held. Since reservations have made it simple for women to enter politics, good governance must prevail in order for women to fulfil their leadership positions effectively and appropriately.

VIII. Conclusion

Indian women, who come from a variety of social, economic, political, geographical, and linguistic backgrounds, constitute the majority of the country's population. The women have a lot of development potential, but they find it difficult to recognise their own strength. In 1995, the Panchayat Raj

Institutions introduced the 33.33 percent seat reservation for women in order to recognise the importance of women in the changing socio-economic and political environment. The women had worked as sarpanches for many years and successfully implemented for people many welfare schemes, programmes, and valuable contributions towards the construction of infrastructure like education, health, roads, housing, drinking water, sanitation, environmental protection, and the overall growth of the village with community-oriented services.

Instead, a number of internal factors, such as a lack of awareness, experience, knowledge, talent, leadership quality, a low level of education, a lack of exposure, etc., affect the process of women's empowerment and participation, as do external ones, such as the influence of family, caste, social outlook, patriarchy, etc. More specifically, the majority of SC/ST and female representatives encountered problems with the official and higher caste/dominant elements of their Gramapanchayat not cooperating with them. The majority of elected woman Sarpanchs are considered as little more than "Rubber Stamps," and their husbands or other prominent members of the community handle all Panchayat duties. Under the direction of women representatives across India, it has failed to provide better governance.

In addition According to the data, women sarpanches face numerous challenges in performing their duties at the village level. These issues include a lack of funding from the government for development work, a lack of training for women sarpanches, delays in the approval and sanction of development work from the upper level, and a lack of experience as leaders. In order to encourage their participation in developmental programmes, training programmes to strengthen leadership abilities, support for women's empowerment, and panchayat activities for the welfare of village individuals, they must be inspired to engage in socio-economic and political activities.

References:

1. Narender Paul, A Case Study on Women leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) at the Gram Panchayat level, Office of National Director CORD and CORD Training Centre, Sidhbar, 2016, P-4.
2. Bhabhor, S.M., Kunchala, K.D. and Patel, J.K., Problems faced by tribal women sarpanches in performing their duties and exercising their power under Panchayati Raj System, Adv. Res. J. Soc. Sci., Vol.4, Issue.1, 2013, P.109.
3. Pragya Milind, Role of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Madhya Pradesh: Issues and Challenges, Educreator Research Journal, Vol.X No.II March – April 2023 P.85.
4. Dr. Sudhir Varma, Analysing the strengths and weakness of women representative in Panchayati Raj institutions in Ralston, Shiva charan Matur Social Policy Research Institute Jaipur India, P.12.
5. Snehalata Majhi and Birendra Suna, Women's Participation in Gram Panchayat Elections in Banspal Block of Keonjhar District of Odisha: A Socio-Political Analysis PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology, (PJAEE,) Vol. 17 No.6, 2020, P.12807.
6. Women's Leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions An analysis of six states (Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh) Participatory Research in Asia, Nov.1999, New Delhi, P.5.
7. Neha Diwakar Desai, Gender, Democracy and Empowerment: Gram Panchayats and the Women of INDIA NUJS Journal of Regulatory Studies Vol. 2 Issue.1, P.2-3.

8. Supra Note- 5, Pp.12811-12812.
9. Sanjeev.C. Shirpurkar, Women Representation and Rural Development through Panchayati Raj System in India- Emerging Trends and Challenges, EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) Peer Reviewed Journal Vol. 6, Issue. 10, October, 2020, P. 286-287
10. Narender Paul, A Case Study on Women leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) at the Gram Panchayat level, Office of National Director CORD and CORD Training Centre, Sidhbar, Pp.10-14.
11. L. Thirupath, The Issues and Challenges to Women Leadership at Grassroots Level Democracy in India -An Evaluation, YMER Vol. 21, Issue 11, Nov, 2022, Pp. 678-681.
12. Bhabhor, S.M., Kunchala, K.D. and Patel, J.K ,Problems faced by tribal women sarpanches in performing their duties and exercising their power under Panchayati Raj System, Adv. Res. J. Soc. Sci., Vol.4, Issue.1, 2013, P.110.
13. Minaketan Bag and Manjulata Jagadala Women Empowerment: Issues and Challenges through the Lens of Reservation in Panchayati Raj System, Acme Intellectuals International Journal of Research in Management, Social Sciences & Technology January, 2016, P. 2939.

Website Sources:

1. <https://compass.rauias.com/polity/role-challenges-women-panchayati-raj-institutionsg>.
2. <https://blog.ipleaders.in/panchayat-raj-analysis-of-issues-faced-and-the-role-of-women/>
3. <https://indianexpress.com/article/political-pulse/sarpanch-pati-madhya-pradesh-women-representatives-oath-reservation-8084346/>
4. <https://www.bu.edu/gdp/2022/05/08/institutional-practices-not-power-hungry-husbands-are-the-biggest-problem-facing-female-leaders-in-india/>
5. https://www.drishtias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/sarpanch-patism/print_manually
6. <https://www.indiatoday.in/lifestyle/people/story/these-female-sarpanchs-are-changing-how-indian-villages-look-1222228-2018-04-28>
7. <https://www.jaagore.com/index.php/articles/power-of-49/5-women-sarpanch-leaders-showing-india-the-way-forward>
8. <https://www.civildaily.com/story/panchayati-raj-institutions-issues-and-challenges/>
9. <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/indepth/panchayats-working-women-22753>
10. <https://nenow.in/north-east-news/challenges-of-panchayat-and-woman-representation.html>
11. <https://unacademy.com/content/kerala-psc/study-material/sociology/women-in-panchayat-raj-institutions/>
12. <https://statetimes.in/sarpanch-pati-becoming-obstacle-in-women-empowerment/>
13. <https://theamikusrise.com/women-reservation-in-panchayat-its-achievement-and-reality/>
14. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/womens-representation-in-indias-parliament/>