

## **Role of Women in Panchayati Raj: Issues and Challenges**

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### **Abstract**

*In this article discusses about some challenges in the system of Panchayati raj institutions to become more effective institutions of local self-Women- confident and empowered Panchayat of 73rd Constitutional amendments. Women feel that Pradhans of Panchayats are becoming agents of implementation of government schemes and programs at the grass root level. Women at the Panchayati Raj level state that in a political party ideology/affiliation/tagging sometimes affects the development of Panchayat. She stated that there are some positive steps for decentralizing in terms of greater space being given to Panchayats for deciding their own development through the participation of local manpower. However, poor infrastructure and lack of capacities of members of the Panchayat is the major cause for the less effectiveness of the programs at grass root levels. Women's response is that Pradhan as an elected representative has a social, physical, moral and developmental responsibilities towards the Panchayat. At present time in the Panchayat Raj Institution, women are only used by the patriarchal society as an instrument to continue the dominancy at the grass root level. This study focused on the real situation of the gram panchayat member which elected by the gram panchayat election this is not the real participation of the women as the constitutional provision to make sure participation of women at the grass root level to increase the spirit of women empowerment in a rural area this article specially focused on the real situation of the women Pradhan's in Muzaffarnagar district and discover the drawback of real participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institution.*

### **Keywords**

*Empowerment, Pradhan, panchayat raj institution, CBOs etc.*

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## **Introduction**

In this article focused on the previously elected village panchayat Pradhan their work and situation in the village and the role of their work to change rural infrastructure. Many elected women what steps should be taken to utilize their rights. In district Muzaffarnagar in three-tier system of panchayat raj institutions, a total voter 13.6 lacks and 12.37 lakh voters voted in election conducted on 19 April 2021. 6.53 lakh male voters 5.84 lakh female voters in district Muzaffarnagar. The highest polling in Budhana and Jansatt blocks was 76% and less voting in the superblock was 64%.

In the previous and present Panchayati Raj election in Uttar Pradesh present a distinct picture of local elections as compared to state-level. The original motto of the state government was not archived in this election due to the three factors—money, power, and violence this is only a challenge to the independent, fair and fear-free election. When we visited in the rural areas of the study we found and observed that the Jajmani system is not fully finished in rural setting of the Muzaffarnagar district the real voting is absent at the time of elections? The pressure of higher caste also influences the voting behavior as well as other section which is not fully independent to participate and make sure the participation in local level government is the women. Women are victimized by patriarchal society and used as an instrument to maintain the local power.

In India, according to the 2011 censuses in rural areas the 68.20% so it is important and critical to understanding the social and political dynamics of Indian villages. To study how the social and political spheres have undergone a noticeable transformation in villages in the recent past. Past practices are reshaped by new trends that seem to be emerging in the context of greater interlinkage between rural and urban. For instance, village life that was far removed from the rigors of urban economic processes associated with globalization is now very much a part of it.

## **Summary**

In this study, we explore how elected women leaders in the Panchayati Raj Institutions succeed in performing their roles despite the highly patriarchal and traditional social norms prevalent in the study area. Some methods are mainly important for the collection of the data from the field such as interview schedules, Observations and Focused Group Discussions were used to collect the required information including the various point such as social, economic, and demographic profiles of the respondents, factors affecting in performing their roles and in obtaining their expectation and suggestions for better leaderships. Which factors promote and facilitate to performance of their role in politics at the grass root level?

Especially weaker section women have significantly contributed to the development of her Panchayat. Many factors led to the success of women in Panchayati raj Institution. These factors include developing herself first through awareness and trainings from odd jobs for her livelihood, good intention to do something for herself and others through network with non-government organizations and government before the leadership role of becoming an effective and capable Pradhan. Women try for betterment of the local level as well as national level by increasing the situation in all areas of the social life and decision making

Women perform a better job by engaging people in Panchayati Raj Institutions not by just knowing and participatory understanding of the Panchayati Raj Institution process, issues, and challenges but by doing concrete action for results. Some work such as employment issues, infrastructure development, women mobilization, livelihood improvement, etc. As a leader, women further built positive relationships with all stakeholders, Panchayat including local leaders at various levels such as MLAs, ministers, corporate, etc.

They strongly believe that women's activities and policies did not alienate those who opposed her. By displaying maturity and active engagement in her interactions and using a direct approach to problem-solving, positive changes in the community and local-self-governance. Today women believe that intent and spirit of the 73rd Constitutional amendments can only be achieved with a strong political will towards empowering Panchayat and not just treating them as mere agents for implementing various programs and schemes at a grass root level.

### **Methodology**

In India's local political system, women are changing the nature of governance. Women increased political participation has yielded positive results—development issues such as increasing responsibilities outside of the home, increasing education, betterment in health, and nutrition, and increase in family income take center in interventions by Panchayati Raj Institution. Women representatives have demonstrated that they have critical information about community resources, learn quickly about how to lead effective community-centered development, are inclined to be more inclusive and are adept at managing funds. Despite such positive results, women remain largely excluded from the PRI and local governance structures. Proxy politics, power brokering and gender-based discrimination continue and many women sarpanch have had to face extreme violence for challenging existing power centers in their communities. Often, male family members deliberately position women in their families to stand for elections so that when they win (under representative quota for women) the men can influence and

control the PRI through the woman from their family. In his field notes on ‘Pradhan in New Panchayats’ in Muzaffarnagar district.

Pai (1998) discussed in his study that reservations provided by the government provide opportunities for women to contest elections and that provision of reservation has not led them to participate in local bodies. Mostly, Presidents were illiterate, belong to better-off families, they do not work outside their homes and contested elections due to family pressure and their decisions were driven by family/community and other dominant male persons who is like the face of that women’s representation in society, not by themselves.

Nambiar (2001) focused in her study of ‘Making the Gram Sabha work’ discussed that the majority of the women reported that they were not informed or invited to meetings of the Gram Sabha in spite husband or the son representing to the women in local after their entry in politics at village level as well as higher level and were hesitant to attend meetings either due to the presence of village elders or because attending meetings would cause them to lose their day’s wages or neglect household duties.

Although the 33% reservation for women in all three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institution in U.P, empowered women to play their roles in PRIs actively, productively, independently, collectively and in a sustainable manner, is a big challenge due to prevalent gender inequality and gender-based discrimination in outreach and service delivery mechanism. We can say that is the best instrument for women’s development at the grass root level.

### **Objectives of the Case Study**

In this study we focus on the following objectives:

1. To understand the factors that enabled women representatives to participate at the Gram Panchayat level.
2. To understand how women’s participation and leadership in the PRIs are changing the dynamics in local self-governance, leading to changes in their life.

The following aspects have been explored:

- Self-confidence of women in PRI
- Freedom of speech and expression
- Dealing with administration
- Decision-making and empowerment at home
- Cooperation with multiple stakeholders and beneficiaries including co-partners
- Factors motivating EWRs to participate in Panchayat

### **Sample selection**

District Muzaffarnagar is the selected for Women Representatives as a sample—Women Pradhan selected from development blocks on the basis of the following criteria: distance from the district headquarters. In this study will confirm, some elected women Pradhan has demonstrated the ability of a woman who, despite her poor family background, and without any political background and political identity, overcame challenges posed by exploitive social norms.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions were selected for this research study:

- 1: Does the participation of a woman in PRI increase her level of awareness and knowledge?
- 2: Has the participation of a woman as an elected representative in PRI increased her social mobility?
- 3: Does the participation of EWR in PRI increase her influence and participation in social, community and political activities?
- 4: Is there any kind of change in the attitude of the husband and other male member?

### **Research Tools**

In this study, some tools also selected for data collection such as Interview schedules, Observations and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) were used to obtain the required information. The interview schedule looked into the demographic profile of the women respondents, factors affecting EWR in performing their roles and expectation and suggestions for better leadership.

The researcher from the time of her joining the panchayat raj institution conducted observations and focus group discussions and who has closely observed her as a woman who emerged as a role model leader and President of her Panchayat and work for village development by active participation in the developmental activity. The data was collected from time to time visited of rural areas.

### **Case Presentation**

The Panchayat was a picture of poor sanitation, lack of employment and more consumption of alcohol. It was through the vision, leadership, teamwork and initiative of the current Pradhan. At the local level in the district, the women Pradhan have faced the difficulties and challenges.

In the first case as case study women Pradhan is 40 years old and has three children—an older son studying in 11th standard in a private school and a younger daughter, studying in 9th standard in a government school nearby the home and

trying to continue to watch the activity during the study hours, as she believes that her daughter is brighter than her son and needs better quality education. Her husband was a worker as a daily wage laborer in agriculture but after entry into politics, they give up this work and rear cattle to make a living for their family. Women consider this as the turning point in the journey of her empowerment.

According to the member of the group after participating in the political activity, women Pradhan and their family mobility increased—she visited banks, insurance companies, other farms and communities with her campaigns and messages for community development. She came to be recognized as a passionate, well-spoken, helpful and a very caring woman, who could make a difference in their community. But this is the one side of the coin. We find out that in some cases the women after winning the election at grass root level only use as a rubber stamp by the son or husband. Some of the family members also have the stamps in his pocket and the women are not well known about the signature document. To stop this overlapping of the right of women the administration gives the direction to ben the participate Pradhan's husband as a representative in the government meetings

#### **Challenges in the Panchayat Faced by the Women**

Women had faced many challenges in performing their work at the grassroots level. The problems of the women can be categorized into the following in main categories such as infrastructure, political, social and health and traditional approaches in rural settings.

Infrastructure-related problems faced by women

- The villages that were more remote were worse off; they did not have proper roads leading to them. The developmental efforts face barriers due to a lack of proper facilities.
- The road facilities in the Panchayat were of poor quality due to inconvenience for the residents of the Panchayat.
- Lack of proper waiting area for commuters waiting for buses, especially during the heavy rainfall that affects the region in monsoons. In the present time, some developmental activities have also been run in recently for removing these problems.
- To promote educational activities. the physical structure had been built for a degree college, but it was not functional due to lack of approval.

#### **Political Problems**

- ✓ While people were attending Gram Sabha meetings, at the ward level, very poor or nil-up GamSabha meetings by the residents.

- ✓ As a woman, she was more visible to the local Minister while pursuing the implementation of her Panchayat development work consequently.
- ✓ The health and veterinary department in the panchayat did not have staff and a proper building to conduct their activities.
- ✓ Prevalent open defecation and poor waste management challenges.

#### **Social Issues/problems**

- ✓ Gender bias and the poor situation of women
- ✓ Lack of proper agreements and conflict among members of the community
- ✓ Family members were getting involved in the matters of running the Panchayat.
- ✓ Low level of women's education.

#### **Outcomes**

Regular feedback from women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions is very important to improve the situation of these barriers in local politics. Through the efforts at the government level, their increased mobility and interactions have enabled her to earn and use her good rapport with various MLAs, ministers and government officials. The higher level of politics is beneficial for the upliftment of the local politics and for making proper and independent space for women in local politics.

#### **Discussion**

Those women elected as Pradhan start their journey as elected representatives in Panchayati Raj Institution with the motivation of the help of family members as well as community members. Reservation for women and marginalized communities such as SC/ST in PRI has definitely helped women in initiating their journey as a leader in Panchayat. Women have consolidated their position and earned a second term based on the results she has delivered in their Panchayat. women candidates who participate in politics essentially to promote the participation of women in the politics. In some cases, it is observable that the women are to create the barrier to women's participation in politics at various levels in inside or as well as outside of the family.

This case study looks at various dimensions of the empowerment framework – material, cognitive, perceptual and relational. Women's association with Mahila Mandal as a leader actively facilitated by an NGO, access to credit/finance through Self Help Groups/banks and various programs and schemes of the government and related agencies, MGNREGA has expanded her material base and enabled her to become socially and economically self-reliant. However, still, in the society, the prevalence of gender discrimination is most deeply entrenched in the family, evident in attitudes towards

daughters-in-law, daughters, and the gender-based division of work, roles and responsibilities as well as the mindset towards domestic violence and issues of ownership and inheritance of land. In the present time, woman Pradhan emerged as a role model by challenging these norms within her own family when giving preference to good quality education for her daughter rather than son, which is the norm in her community and thereby endorsing the Beti Bachao, Beti Padoo campaign. At the social level, an encouraging trend is that women have been able to challenge the norm of purdah in front of their elders and senior villagers, especially men.

The following are some key issues and examples of how women can be empowered to be effective elected representatives in the Panchayati Raj Institutions:

1. S.C. women Pradhan believes that reservation for women has provided her an opportunity for initial entry into the system of PRIs. Elected women Pradhan has increased her circle of influence and action to become more visible and recognized as a leader and changeable policy maker in development issues and action than as a member of a women's group. Women leader of her community, an elected representative in the PRI as follows:
  - "Was earlier hesitant to share about my illness even with my husband. Had no idea about any law for helping women earlier. Did not know there is a women's police station to help women".
  - Woman says "Had no awareness about what help I can get from outside. Had no idea that poor people can earn from different (sources of) income. It has increased my self-confidence and feel more capable now,"
2. Her participation in PRI as EWR has not only influenced her participation in economic decisions but enhanced control over economic resources at home.
3. Women's participation in local self-governance has provided her a large platform for interactions with local communities, stakeholders, administration, and politicians, enabled through enhanced mobility.
4. At the household level too, not only do women receive the support of their husbands and children but their neighbors too have recognized her leadership and boosted her self-confidence with continuous endorsement and support.

Women Pradhan highlights some challenges in the system of governance by stating that a strong political will is essential for enabling PRI to become effective institutions of local self-confident and empowered Panchayat leader governance, in true intent and spirit of the 73rd Constitutional amendments. She sometimes feels that Pradhan of Panchayats is becoming mere agents of implementation of government schemes and programs.



Women political leader acknowledges that there are some positive efforts for decentralizing in terms of greater space being given to Panchayats for deciding the use of funds. However, due to poor infrastructure and lower capacities of some members of the Panchayat, leaders and functionaries of the Panchayat are not able to leverage it. Women leaders share that Pradhan as an elected representative has a number of social, physical, moral and development responsibilities towards the Panchayat but does not receive appropriate remuneration and recognition.

Women Pradhan are expected to do wonders and benefit the neediest persons in their Panchayat but some barriers discussed above decrease the effects of good policy and demotivate to leaders. The Pradhan's role is very demanding but their compensation does not match even the wage rates of the State and is nowhere close to the compensations, salary, and honorariums provided to elected representatives at higher levels in politics.

Importance of the study - This study tries to highlight the key issues which are the barriers to the development of women in the political scenario. It is hoped that this study will help further policymakers and implementers to support PRIs in the true intent and spirit of the Constitution of India. it helpful to identify the hard spot of decision making as village Pradhan for women.

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