

ROLE, FUNCTIONING AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF WOMEN PANCHAYAT MEMBERS IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

The national perspective Plan for women had argued that political power and access to decision making authority are critical requisition for women's equality in the process of nation building. Women participation in both Gram Sabha and Ward Sabha had not been effective. They participated less in number and most of the time remained passive. Considering their educational background and political experience most of the women members needed training regarding objectives of Panchayati Raj System, skills of planning, information on Governmental programmes and articulation skills which may help to increase their efficiency in panchayat administration. The study was done to study the knowledge of women panchayat members about the functions of Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) and to study the achievements made by the women members for the development of their village. This study was conducted in Udaipur district of Rajasthan state, on a sample of 30 panchayat members from 13 different villages through personal interview technique using the schedule. Results shows that majority of the respondents (90.00 %) were newcomers and the reason behind joining panchayat was family/ relatives and husband's pressure. 56.66 percent respondents consulted or consult male panchayat as well as family members. Only 40 per cent of the women were not satisfied with their participation in the panchayat. Cent per cent respondents had a clear concept of ward-sabha and knew the procedure of electing panchayat members. About 2/3rd have knowledge regarding the various functions of panchayat. Now women are coming forward and showing enthusiasm and interest to do something for development of their area. They are doing construction works and establishing community assets.

Keywords: women panchayat members, pri, panchayat, functions

INTRODUCTION

The rural self-governing institution of panchayat is a legacy that has been inherited by this country from the fountainhead of wisdom. Transverse through the Indus valley civilization across Mughal and British rule, the panchayat has always remained vibrant as a federal unit of the grass root structure of Indian democracy. The pace of development in any civil society would be slow if women who constitute about 50% of the population are not facilitated to participate in the development process. India possesses a vast reservoir of women power. The question of women's participation in panchayats in India had merited attention of the committee on the status of women in India (Thakor and Patel, 2021a&b). The national perspective Plan for women had argued that political power and access to decision making authority are critical requisition for women's equality in the process of nation building.

Earlier women were generally viewed as objects of development, an indispensable part of the decision making process. As a result of the reservation formal participation of women in politics has gone up considerably. According

to one calculation about eight lakh women have now been elected to the different tiers of panchayats and municipalities (Datta, 2001). In many cases women have started coming forward recognizing their roles. Women who are removed by "no- confidence" motions have fought back by coming back with high margins of votes and many of them have also seized with the desire to do something for other women. Almost all of them recognized the need for education. They have also started getting themselves appraised with Government schemes for the villages. To make women participation in society and politics a reality, enormous work remains to be done, given their present socio-economic condition.

OBJECTIVES

- (1) To study the knowledge of women panchayat members about the functions of Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI)
- (2) To study the achievements made by the women members for the development of their village

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Udaipur district of

Rajasthan state, on a sample of 30 panchayat members from 13 different villages. Tool in the form of questionnaire consisted of questions related to several aspects of functioning of panchayat, i.e., formation and composition of the panchayat, Functions of panchayat, Duties of Ward Panch and Sarpanch and financial matters related to panchayat and achievements of tasks. Data was collected through personal interview technique using the schedule. Frequency and percentage were used to analyze personal profile, knowledge test, achievements; to have uniformity in the scoring.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal profile of the respondents

Table: 1 Distribution of the respondents on the basis of their age, education, caste, occupation, type of family. (n=30)

Sr. No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percent
1	Age		
	♦ Below 30 years	05	16.66
	♦ Below 30-45 years	16	53.34
	♦ Above 45 years	09	30.00
2	Caste		
	♦ SC	10	33.34
	♦ ST	07	23.33
	♦ Artisan	01	3.33
	♦ Agricultural caste	00	0
	♦ Prestigious caste	12	40.00
3	Type of family		
	♦ Nuclear	10	33.34
	♦ Joint	20	66.66
4	Education		
	♦ Literate	16	53.34
	♦ Illiterate	14	46.66
5	Occupation		
	♦ Main	30	100.00
	♦ Subsidiary	14	46.66

Perusal of Table 1 reveals that more than half of the respondents (53.34%) belonged to the age group of 30-45 years. About 40 percent respondents were from prestigious caste, that is Rajpoot, Brahmin, while 33.34 and 23.33 percent respondents were from SC and ST, respectively. Two third of the respondents (66.66%) had joint families. More than half of the respondents (53.34%) were literate and they were able to read and write only. All the respondents (100%)

have their main occupations (Agriculture, Animal husbandry, Service), on the other hand, 46.66 percent respondents run their subsidiary businesses like part time labourers, vegetable selling, papad making and selling etc.

Table 2 : Percentage distribution of respondents according to the income levels (n=30)

Sr. No.	Income level	Frequency	Percent
1	High	18	60.00
2	Low	12	40.00

Table 2 depicts the economic status of the respondents. 60 percent respondents comes under the high category. Data in the table 3 portrays that all the respondents have land. 50 and 40 per cent came in the marginal and large categories, respectively. Regarding type of house 30 percent of respondents had semi pucca type of houses.

Table :3 Percentage distribution of respondents according to type of farmer, house, house ownership and farm power (n=30)

Sr. No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percent
1	Type of Farmer		
	♦ Small	03	10.00
	♦ Marginal	15	50.00
	♦ Large	12	40.00
2	House		
	♦ Kuchcha+Pucca	09	30.00
	♦ Pucca	21	70.00
3	House ownership		
	♦ Rented	06	20.00
	♦ Own	24	80.00
4	Farm power*		
	♦ Drought Animals	25	83.33
	♦ Well	21	70.00
	♦ Tractor	17	56.66

* Multiple answers.

Table 3 also depicts that 80 per cent of the panchayat women members had their own houses. Nearly, same amount from the sample had draught animals in their farms, while 70 percent ladies had wells on their farm. On the contrary 56.66 percent respondents had tractor as farm power.

Regarding material possession cent percent

respondents had bullock, cycle /motor cycle/ jeep, chairs. 60 percent of the women subjects had milch animals and 56.66 percent panchayat members had implements / equipments. Only 10 percent of the respondents had agro-based industry (Table: 4).

Table 4 : Percentage distribution of the respondents on the basis for their material possession and media exposure (n=30)

Sr. No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percent
1	Material possession*		
	♦ Bullock	30	100.00
	♦ Milch Animals	18	60.00
	♦ Cycle, Motor cycle, Jeep	30	100.00
	♦ Radio	22	73.33
	♦ Chairs	30	100.00
	♦ Implements/ equipments	17	56.66
	♦ Agro based industry	03	10.00
2	Mass media exposure*		
	♦ Radio	22	73.33
	♦ Films	18	60.00
	♦ Exhibitions	04	13.33
	♦ Books	07	23.33
	♦ Magazines	13	43.33
	♦ Newspaper	15	50.00
	♦ Television	24	80.00
	♦ Any other	18	60.00

* Multiple answers.

Related Information

Table 5 : Frequency and percentage distribution of panchayat members on the basis of related information (n=30)

Sr. No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percent
1	Entry in panchayat		
	• First time elected	27	90.00
	• Second time elected	03	10.00
2	Reasons behind joining the panchayat		
	• Willingly	08	26.66
	• Husband's pressure	14	46.68
	• Relative's pressure	08	26.66
3	Frequency of attending the meetings		
	• Regularly	19	63.33
	• Once in a while	04	13.33
	• Never	07	23.34
4	Reasons for not attending meeting regularly		
	• Male members of family attend	05	16.66
	• Not allowed by family	02	06.66
	• Lack of information about time and place	04	13.33
	• Lack of time	19	63.35
5	Liking for meetings		
	• Likes	23	76.66
	• Dislikes	07	23.34

Sr. No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percent
6	Ways of contributing in women's development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through encouraging them for education Through giving knowledge about women development programmes By making SHGs Financial help and guidance for self employment By providing free medicines, antenatal and postnatal services through PHCs 	17 02 07 05 02	56.66 6.66 23.34 16.66 06.66
7	Consultation by male panchayat members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes No 	100 00	100 00
8	Approaching rural women's problem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes No 	17 13	56.66 43.34
9	Type of problems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial Personal and family Social Administrative 	12 07 03 05	40.00 23.33 10.00 16.66
10	Satisfaction with their own participation	12	40.00

This subsection presents information pertaining to entry of women in panchayat, reasons for joining panchayat, frequency and reason of attending meetings, contribution in women's development, approach to solving problems of women, consultation by male members of panchayat on different problems and satisfaction of members. Pursual of table 5 shows that majority of the respondents (90.00 %) were newcomers and the reason behind joining panchayat was family/ relatives and husband's pressure, while 26.66 percent women subjects joined the panchayat willingly. More than half of the respondents (63.33%) always attend meetings of panchayat. Merely, 6.66 percent women's family members didn't allow them to attend the meetings. While 16.66 percent family members attend meeting on their behalf. Lack of time to attend the meetings was reported by majority of the respondents (63.5%).

When women subjects were asked about their likings to attend the panchayat meetings, more than 2/3rd (76.66%) of the respondents expressed their liking to attend the meetings, but due to above mentioned reasons, they couldn't be able to attend the meetings regularly. Meena (2001) extrapolated that women participation in both Gram Sabha and Ward Sabha had not been effective. They participated less in number and most of the time remained passive. The articulation on the issue of developmental needs, planning and implementation remained poor.

Data in the table 5 depicts that the distribution of respondents according to the ways of contributing in women's development, also. More than half of the respondents (56.66%) agreed that a women member of panchayat can

encourage the women for education. Several respondents (23.34%) mention that panchayat members can help women to develop by making SHGs.

The table 5 also reveals that 56.66 percent respondents consulted or consult male panchayat members. Cent per cent panchayat members approached to solve the problems of women. Regarding types of problems, 40 per cent of the respondents solve problems related to financial matters and 23.33 percent problems related to Personal and Family factors. While 5 ladies (16.66 %) tried to solve the administrative problems but with the consultation of male panchayat members. Subrahmanyam (2002) also stated in his article that elected women chairpersons, particularly at the village level panchayat, had to depend exclusively on their family members in performing their official duties. Many of these members having one or more members of their husband's family engaged in social or political life. Many of the members and sarpanches did not know the nuances of panchayat administration and had to depend to a considerable extent on their men for transacting.

It is evident from the table 5 that most of the women were not satisfied with their participation in the panchayat. They wanted to be active participant and do more for development of their village and particularly for the women's development. This indicates possibility of more active participation of women in future.

Knowledge of the Respondents about Composition and Functioning of Panchayat

The knowledge component of behaviour plays

an important role in covert as well as overt behaviour of an individual. It bestows judicious confidence to work, helps to seek and use important information, logically aids to communicate effectively and to understand rationally. A panchayat member should know all about the panchayat in which one is going to do her job so that she can work more

effectively. The knowledge of the women panchayat members about different aspects of composition and functioning of panchayat, i.e., structure of PRI, method of election, tenure and minimum age required, reservation, concept and frequency of gram-sabha and ward-sabha and so on, in this section.

Table 6 : Distribution of respondents according to knowledge regarding composition and functioning of panchayat

(n=30)

Sr. No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percent
1	No. of levels in PRI	30	100.00
2	Tenure of panchayat members	26	86.66
3	Way of electing panchayat members	30	100.00
4	Member hierarchy of PRI	27	90.00
5	Minimum age limit for panchayat membership	30	100.00
6	Women reservation in panchayat	07	23.33
7	No. of ward-sabha in a year	11	36.66
8	Percentage of votes required to be the member of ward-sabha	13	43.33
9	Regarding functions of ward-sabha	07	23.33
10	President of ward-sabha	30	100.00
11	About the duties of ward panch	14	46.66
12	About functions of panchayat	19	63.33
13	About the duties of sarpanch	15	50.00
14	Knowledge regarding days on which panchayat meets be held	05	16.66
15	About gram-sabha	17	56.66
16	Frequency of gram-sabhas in a year	13	43.33
17	President of gram-sabha	30	100.00
18	No. of women members in each committee	07	23.33
19	How much panchayat get the finance from the govt.?	16	53.33
20	Sources of earning of gram panchayat	11	36.66
21	Maximum amount panchayat can spent on developmental work	08	26.66

It is highlighted in the table 6 that all the respondents had a clear concept of ward-sabha and knew the procedure of electing panchayat members, i.e., through secret ballot; since they all were above 21 years and participated in election. Different members of panchayat (hierarchy) as well as their tenure was known by majority of the respondents (86.66-100.00%). About 36.66-43.33 percent respondents possessed knowledge about the frequency of organizing ward-sabha and gram-sabha. Minimum age limit for panchayat membership is 21 years which was known by cent percent respondents.

It is clearly evident that half of the ladies knew about the duties of sarpanch. Only 23.33 percent respondents

fully knew about the functioning of ward-sabha. Duties are the task or set of tasks required to perform. When women panchayat members were asked about the duties of ward-panch, only 46.66 percent (less than half of the respondents) were able to answer correctly. Panwar (2001) supported with his results that all the women sarpanches selected for study except one sarpanch who had little knowledge about the powers and functions of the Panchayati Raj and the Govt. schemes. Regarding financial matters, more than half of the respondents knew about the amount of finance get by the panchayat from the government. While only 36.66 percent women subjects knew about the sources of earning of gram panchayat.

Achievements of women panchayat members for the development of their village

Table 7 : Distribution of respondents according to their achievements (n=30)

Sr. No.	Items	Achievements	
		F	%
1	Construction work	13	43.33
2	Establishment of community assets	06	20.00
3	Other works	11	36.67

Now women are coming forward and showing enthusiasm and interest to do something for development of their area. More than 1/3rd respondents accomplished construction work (Table 7), which includes water tank, community tap, roads, school buildings, hospital, irrigation system, sewage/ drainage, chaupal, public latrines, houses etc.

Establishment of community assets includes public playground, old age education center, PHCs, rural shops, bus stand, cooperative stores, anganwadi/ balwadi/ mahila mandals etc. were done by only 20 per cent women panchayat members.

Other works (done by 36.67%) includes development of waste lands, renovation of roads, plantation, cleaning of village, women and child welfare programmes, making SHGs, increasing participation of women in ward-sabha or/ & gram-sabha.

Shyamala and Pinjar (2000) postulated that most of the women members showed interest in providing facilities like water supply and sanitation to their constituency. Women members were more concerned about problems related to human life.

CONCLUSION

Results show that majority of the respondents (90.00 %) were newcomers and the reason behind joining panchayat was family/ relatives and husband's pressure. More than half of the respondents (63.33%) always attend meetings of panchayat. When women subjects were asked about their likings to attend the panchayat meetings, more than 2/3rd (76.66%) of the respondents expressed their liking to attend the meetings. 56.66 percent respondents consulted or consult male panchayat as well as family members. Cent per cent respondents had a clear concept of ward-sabha and knew the procedure of electing panchayat members. 86.66 per cent knew about panchayat hierarchy. About 2/3rd have

knowledge regarding the various functions of panchayat. Near about half of the respondents knew about the amount of finance get by the panchayat from the government. It is also affirmed by Subharmanyam (2002) that now women are coming forward and showing enthusiasm and interest to do something for development of their area. They are doing construction works and establishing community assets.

The Government has approved the proposal for enhancing reservation of women in Panchayats from the present one-third to 50% (PIB, 2011). Women are also making substantial contributions in giving suggestions for raising educational standards, addressing water sanitation and fuel problems - areas which were generally not discussed by men. Because of the increasing awareness among women of their potential, they are slowly gaining the confidence to overcome social stigmas. Slowly but steadily, women elected to panchayats are asserting themselves and, in the process, giving a new thrust to grassroot governance (Anonymous, 2022).

IMPLICATIONS

A woman is opportuned to tell and prove her own importance in playing the role of administrator, leader and sound decision maker after the establishment of PRIs in India and the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of year 1992 is regarded as a milestone, which gives the opportunity to the women to flourish and succeed (Srivatsa, 2016). Few implications are as below:

- (1) The women leaders who are elected in PRI need to be at least literate, which ultimately helps them guide and tell the rural people regarding the various provisions of the PR-Act.
- (2) There should be an essential training for them to find the ways and means to interface with other layers of local self-governance within the state and claim the Panchayat's entitlements.
- (3) Women Panchayat members should be familiarized with various development programmes related to the rural/women/child of state and central governments.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict between author.

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