



POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ROLE OF WOMEN SARPANCH IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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“Woman is the builder of nation’s destiny. Though delicate and soft as lily, she has a heart, far stronger and bolder than of man. She is the supreme inspiration of man’s onward march”.

**Rabindranath Tagore*

Abstract: India is also a democratic country and a nation of villages. Over 70% of Indians live in villages, and panchayats have long served as the basis of the country's rural socio-economic and political system. It appears that women representatives who have knowledge of their rights and responsibilities as well as an adequate knowledge of government policies and programmes are doing a great job exercising their political rights; however, there are times when the main issues these representatives face when using their political rights or powers are the mobilisation of men, family pressure and responsibilities, social criticism, and financial difficulties brought on by a lack of financial management skills. It is difficult for women to stand for election in such a circumstance on their own. In spite of these challenges, the proportion of women in leadership roles is rising, and as a consequence of their work, political and social awareness in the villages is rising daily. The chapter attempts explore of political and social role of women sarpanch in rural development, taking ample opportunities for implementation of schemes and programmes with exercises to power performing work in panchayati Raj institutions.

Key words: Panchayat raj, political, social, role of women sarpanch, and rural development.

I. Introduction

The cornerstone of Indian society was made up of women. The spirit of women is the basis of Indian civilization. Women were vital to the independence fight and to the noble Mahatma Gandhi's leadership. In Gandhiji's view, women could make a valuable contribution to the reconstruction of society, and achieving social justice required acknowledging their equality. Panchayati institutions have the greatest potential to influence rural India's overall development under democratic decentralisation. One-third of the total number of women in the panchayat is now reserved according to the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, also referred to as the Panchayat Raj Act. Ironically, this resulted in women in leadership positions becoming more empowered and elevated. The panchayat provided a more active role for women, so enhancing their participation in society and in public life. The government introduced the 2009 Constitution Bill into parliament, which called for a 50% reservation for women in leadership positions. By taking this opportunity, the women's leadership may contribute significantly to the development of homes, roads, schools, health care, drinking water, sanitation, and environmental protection for the benefit of the village community. Sometimes the mobilisation of men, family pressure and responsibilities, social criticism, and financial difficulties due to a lack of financial management skills, leadership qualities, exposure, and lack of training are the major problems facing these representatives in the use of political powers or rights; that is, a mixed situation can be seen in the use of political powers. However, women representatives who are aware of their rights and duties and have a sufficient understanding of government policies and schemes appear to be exercising their political rights very well.

II. Objective of the research paper: The research paper is intended to examine the present status of women's participation in the panchayati raj system, their duties for the overall development of village communities, and the challenges faced in political participation.

1. To study the socio-economic and political role of women sarpanches in rural development

2. To examine women's status, political participation, challenges, and difficulties faced in Panchayati Raj institutions.

III. Research methodology: The present research paper is based on secondary data. The method used was descriptive-analytical for the completion of the research paper.

IV. Review of literature: The research paper basically relied on secondary sources of data. The purpose of the research was to find out the present status of women's participation in panchayati raj institutions and the political and socio-economic role of women in rural communities. In this regard, enormous literature is available in the form of books, journals, reports, and news. Recently, one researcher conducted field surveys in some districts in Anta Panchayat Samiti of Baran District and Itawa Panchayat Samiti of Kota District of Rajasthan, and finally, the research was completed.

V. Women and Panchayati Raj Institutions

Political empowerment of women starts with the active participation of women in political institutions. The grass-root level democracy entail due importance to initial participation of women in panchayati Raj institution's. After the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments enacted in 1993 opened a new vista in women's journey towards empowerment; for they paved the way for assured entry of women in grassroots governance through 33 per cent reservation for them in Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs). Conceptually, providing representation to women in Panchayati Raj institutions could be accepted as an important planning approach regarding minimizing the traditional feeling of people about the status of women in our society, particularly in terms of keeping women under the subjugation of men, imposing restriction by the households and society against them in the availing of certain opportunities and several other social, cultural and traditional bindings disavouring them for improving personal life style and status in existing social and economic setting.

VI. Status and role of women's participation in panchayati raj institutions

As women's reservations in panchayati institutions increase, the following broad patterns about women's position and roles are emerging:

1. **Conversion of Elite politics into mass politics:** In the past ten years, only close relatives, wives, or daughters of powerful men were able to enter politics through election candidatures; however, this has drastically altered. Women from different backgrounds and social classes are now election winners and hold significant power in these three-tier panchayati institutions. It may now be argued that a public culture of politics has evolved from the elite culture of politics.
2. **Decline of the concept of Sarpanch husband (Pati):** Although 50% of seats were reserved for women, there is enough truth in the statement that most women in the early decade did not want to enter politics voluntarily. However, Patidev worked hard to ensure that women who were given the opportunity to run for office won. Once the wife was elected, he took on the role of executive sarpanch, and his wife, who had been chosen by the people, was perceived as a rubber stamp. It appeared as though women's doubts were no longer taken seriously, but in the past several years, it has become evident that three women not only won the election on their own merits, but also demonstrated their aptitude for making decisions.
3. **Three-tier pressure on women in a three-tier panchayati system :**There is no disputing the fact that women in Panchayati institutions suffer pressure from their families and society prior to being elected, but that pressure also escalates once they are elected. In other words, women in three-tier Panchayati institutions must contend with pressure from three tier pressures. On their abilities to make decisions, participate in politics, and work efficiently, these pressures can occasionally have the opposite consequences.
4. **Even mixed status with respect to the exercise of political rights :**Women representatives who are aware of their rights and responsibilities as well as sufficient knowledge of government policies and programmes appear to be effectively exercising their political rights; however, there are times when the primary obstacles these representatives encounter while exercising their political rights or powers are the mobilisation of men, family pressure and responsibilities, social criticism, and financial difficulties brought on by a lack of financial management skills.
5. **Growing political consciousness as well as the proportion of women representatives:** Although there has unquestionably been a significant increase in female representation and awareness over the past 25 years, and the progress has generally been in a favourable direction, the rural environment is still affected by resources like money, electricity, and labour. It is difficult for women to stand for politics in such a circumstance on their own. In spite of these obstacles, there is still an increase in the number of female representatives, and as a result of their work, social and political awareness in the villages increases daily.
6. **Women's representation plays different roles in rural and urban settings:** The female representative appears to play a creative role in rural development if she has a high level of education, a self-sufficient economic perspective, and grew up in a city or nearby town. With few exceptions, elected female representatives from remote and inaccessible places are unable to make important decisions; they may

struggle to effectively communicate their thoughts to the public and play a very small part in the decision-making process itself.

7. **Initiatives to achieve financial independence via self-help organisations:** Currently, self-help groups exist at nearly every panchayat level. Women-led panchayati institutions, in particular, have played a significant role in empowering rural women by facilitating their connection to rural industries and supporting their overall development.
8. **Slogans have an increasing influence on rural populations:** Similarly, slogans such as "*Tan Ki safai-Man Kisafai*" and "*Saf Safai-Sabkobhai*" and "*Na Gandgi karenge-Na karne denge*" and "*Mahilapadhegis Vikas gadhegi and Gadii wala aaya ghar se kachra nikal*" impacted the opinions of the public, male and female representatives alike, and motivated them to pursue development in a hygienic and salubrious atmosphere.

VII. Role of women sarpanch rural development

The process of improving the quality of living and economic stability of people living in rural areas which are sometimes remote and sparsely populated is known as rural development. The traditional focus of rural development has been on the extraction of resources that need a lot of land, such forestry and agriculture. However, the nature of rural areas has altered due to shifts in global production and increasing urbanisation. Resource extraction and agriculture have gradually given way to tourism, specialist manufacturing, and recreational activities as the main economic drivers. Instead of just providing incentives for resource- or agriculture-based businesses, rural communities now need to focus on a wider variety of development goals due to their need to approach development from a broader viewpoint. In order to improve rural areas, education, entrepreneurship, physical infrastructure, and social infrastructure are all crucial.

The chapter had taken original thesis data for reference from the researcher, who conducted field surveys in some districts in Anta Panchayat Samiti of Baran District and Itawa Panchayat Samiti of Kota District of Rajasthan. As per the field survey of research, the women sarpanch's who have undertaken various developmental and changing factors such as social, cultural, economic, political, educational, the implementation of government schemes, and income sources of panchayats.

Table No. 1 showing the means of rural development

Rural Development			
Sl	Particular	Numbers (EWRs)	Percentage
	Employment Development	82	25.23%
	Development of resources in the village	94	28.93%
	Economic Development of village	54	16.61%
	Connecting the village to the cities	63	19.38%
	Development in Social, Cultural , Educational etc.	32	9.85%
	Total	325	100%

Table No. 1 shows that 82 EWRs have a mean rural development percentage of 25.23% for employment development, 94 EWRs have a mean rural development percentage of 28.93% for resource development in the village, 54 EWRs have a mean rural development percentage of 16.61% for economic development, 63 EWRs have a mean rural development percentage of 19.38% for connecting the village to the cities, and 32 EWRs have a mean rural development percentage of 9.85% for social, cultural, and educational level, etc. Thus, the above table's conclusion is that development at the social, cultural, educational, and other levels is represented by the smallest (9.85%) and rural development at the maximum (28.93%) levels, which corresponds to the development of village resources.

A. Functions of (EWRs) Panchayati's

The women sarpanch carried out a variety of responsibilities for the village panchayat's wellbeing. The elected woman representative is able to carry out all initiatives and programmes for the benefit of the local area. Water, power, resources for construction, health services, and community development are considered basic amenities.

Table No. 2. the women sarpanch performed the following functions in the panchayat's

FUNCTIONS OF PANCHAYATS IN RURAL AREAS			
S. No.	Particular	Number (EWR)	Percentage
	Provide a drinking water system	70	21.54%
	Provide a power or Electricity System	84	25.84%
	Road Construction	65	20.00%
	Primary health	70	21.54%
	Women and Child Development	36	11.08%
	Total	325	100%

After analysing Table No. 2, the researcher concluded that 70 elected women representatives, or 21.54% of the total, are aware of the function performed by panchayats in the provision of drinking water systems; 84 EWRs, or 25.84%, are aware of the functions of providing power and electricity systems; 65 EWRs, or 20.00%, are aware of road

construction; 70 EWRs, or 21.54%, are aware of primary health; and 36 EWRs, or 11.08%, are aware of women and child development. Based on the above table, the researcher has concluded that the majority of Elected Women Representative (25.84%) knows that panchayats are responsible for power and electricity systems, while the minority (11.08%) know that panchayats are also involved in the development of women and children.

B. Social Development (EWRs)

Changes in behaviour and thought patterns, as well as adjustments to any part of social processes, social patterns, social interaction, or social organisation, are all considered forms of social growth.

The elected women representatives of the districts of Anta Panchayat Samiti of Baran and Itawa Panchayat Samiti of Kota District of Rajasthan have undertaken social development in panchayats, as seen in the survey conducted by the researcher in the areas in the following **Table No. 3**.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT WHICH WAS SEEN IN THE STUDY AREA

Sl. No	Particular	Number (EWRs)	Percentage
	Don't be concern about material restrictions	50	15.39%
	Don't accept the prerequisites caste and marriage	40	12.31%
	Restriction on evils the customs, and misdeeds	33	10.15%
	Prohibition on selection of caste occupation	57	17.54%
	The basis of stratification isn't on caste but equality	84	25.85%
	Increase of social classes	61	18.76
	Total	325	100%

Table No. 3 shows that 40 EWRs, with a 12.31% acceptance rate, reject marriage and the needed caste, and 50 EWRs, with a 15.39% view of social development in the village as unconcerned with marital restrictions. 10.15% of EWRs are devoted to restrictions on evils, customs, and misdeeds; 17.54% are devoted to prohibitions on the selection of caste occupations; 84 EWRs are devoted to the argument that eligibility, not caste, is the basis for stratification; and 61 EWRs are devoted to the rise of social classes. Thus, the above table concludes that while smaller EWRs (10.15%) identify limitations on evils, customs, and so on, the bulk of EWRs (25.85%) consider social development in the villages as the basis of stratification that isn't caste but eligibility.

C. Political Development

According to the current situation, women are increasingly participating in panchayat Raj institutions, which elect women to lead various development programmes. Additionally, their ability to work towards tying various village population segments into the introduced programmes is crucial to enhancing the status of women as representatives in the village panchayat's social environment. Consequently, this approach would result in a stronger sense of empowerment.

The survey data highlights and shows the political changes of the elected women representatives in the village panchayati. **The following table is No. 4.**

POLITICAL CHANGES IN THE FIELD AREA

Sl.	Particular	Number - EWRs)	Percentage
	Changes in Caste Politics and Caste Fanaticism	42	12.93%
	More and more trend of villagers towards Politics.	36	11.08%
	Understanding politics and diplomacy by villagers	22	6.77%
	More and more women are participating in politics	32	9.85%
	Changes in the Election Process	48	14.77%
	Use of Electronic Machine in Voting	50	15.38%
	Increase in the importance voters at the time of elections	20	6.115%
	Increased among various politics parities	35	10.76%
	Increase in Politicians qualifications	40	12.31%
	Total	325	100%

Table No. 4 shows that 42 EWRs (12.93%) noticed changes in village politics as changes in caste politics and fanaticism, 36 EWRs (11.08%) saw a trend of villagers becoming more and more involved in politics, 22 EWRs (6.77%) witnessed villagers understanding politics and diplomacy, and 32 EWRs (9.85%) noted an increase in the number of women participating in politics. The election process has changed in 48 EWRs (14.77%), voting machines have been used in 50 EWRs (15.38%), voters are more important during elections (20 EWRs 6.15%), there is more competition among political parties in 35 EWRs (10.76%), and political qualifications have increased in 40 EWRs (12.31%). Consequently, the above table's conclusion is that the highest percentage of EWRs (15.38%) attribute political changes in villages to the employment of electronic voting machines, while the lowest percentage (6.15%) attribute them to an increase in the importance of voters during elections.

VIII. Challenges faced by women sarpanch

With the approval of 33% of the seats, Panchayati Raj institutions demonstrated their continued faith in women's leadership. It urged patriarchal society to change the negative perceptions it holds about women. Low-caste women who had previously been denied opportunities were also given access to it. This had a cascading effect that increased women's confidence in their abilities and inspired them to seek out important roles in society. Through the establishment, growing, and promotion of MSMEs, cooperatives, and self-help groups, PRIs aimed to increase employment and livelihood opportunities in rural areas through women. Rather than seeing women sarpanch while disguising their roles, he faces numerous obstacles.

- 1) Even while the women got political representation, "The Sarpanch Pati," their husbands, usurped the real power, preventing them from achieving any significant progress.
- 2) Despite achieving political positions, women continue to face prejudice based on their gender and caste, and they are not treated with the respect they deserve.
- 3) Women are not permitted to talk freely in Grama Sabha's due to their disorderliness.
- 4) Ignorance and widespread illiteracy further restrict their capacity to perform.
- 5) Because their efforts are perceived as straining the conservative social fabric, many women leaders in panchayats have been attacked, and some casualties have also been reported.
- 6) Another obstacle to women's empowerment through PRIs may be the recent amendment in Rajasthan regarding the inclusion of educational requirements up to the eighth and tenth grades as eligibility requirements for PRI elections.

IX. Conclusion

In its form of minimum governance and maximum government, the panchayati system is assisting in the development of responsible democracy. In this three-tiered system of panchayati governance, women and all other classes have equal access to political involvement chances at all levels. By seizing this chance, the leadership of women can contribute significantly to the development of infrastructure, including housing, roads, healthcare, education, drinking water, sanitation, and environmental protection. Throughout the entire process, the development of women and the emphasis on their growth should be our main concerns. The future of rural India can be altered if we can uphold harmony in values and progress. Only then will we be able to create strong families, societies, villages, and countries. Consequently, women face many obstacles while performing their duty in the gramme panchayat, including a lack of funds from governments, a lack of people's mind-set, a lack of leadership qualities, a lack of awareness of government schemes, etc., but instead of these, they attempt to achieve the overall development of the village.

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