



# Empowerment of Rural Women by Panchayati Raj: Constitutional Provision and Ground Reality

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**Abstract:** The present article is about the role of Panchayati Raj system in the empowerment of rural women in India. Author done a study of 300 women in the Uttar Pradesh state to know the ground reality. Author find that although there are many provisions to protect rights of women but Panchayati Raj system after 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment is very effective tool for empowerment of rural women in the country. This empowerment has not yet achieved the desired objective in the male dominated society, but it needs to be maintained with some reforms. The Panchayati Raj system has an important contribution in women empowerment. We will get good results over the time.

**Key Words:** Panchayati Raj, 73rd Constitutional Amendment, Women Empowerment, Rural Development, Uttar Pradesh.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The progress of any society depends on its human resources, equality between women and men. These are the pillars of the social structure. For complete and continuous development, it is necessary that both base pillars, ie, men and women, together contribute to the building of the society. But in the context of underdeveloped and developing countries, this notion proves to be a fantasy. In our society, a man continues to assert his traditional rights in the traditionally conferred power, the reasoning behind this is that he is capable of taking decisions. The rationality behind the house work done by women is that they lack intelligence, vision and strong decision-making skills. Such and many other shortcomings have also been associated with women for a long time without any logical basis. Women of rural communities in India are handicapped by entrenched caste, class and gender hierarchies, ethnic and religious discrimination as well as unequal distribution of resources. Poor women of rural communities adopt many creative strategies to cope with difficult and highly unequal situations. However, programmes taken up by the government for the empowerment of women of rural communities often fail to recognize these. Whereas it has been proved without any dilemma that if women are provided equal opportunities and facilities, then women can not only act like men but also do better than them.

Our country has been rural predominant. According to the 2011 census, 71.3 percent of the total population of the country lives in villages. After independence, the government focused on the development of the rural community. The Government started the Community Development Plan (1952) and the National Extension Scheme (1953) with a view to accelerate rural development, but unfortunately these schemes could not achieve their targets. Based on the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957), the three-tier Panchayati Raj system was implemented in the country in 1959. The Ashok Rai Mehta Committee (1977) and the G. V. Rao Committee (1985) gave important suggestions to make the Panchayati Raj system person-oriented.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, which came into force from April 24, 1993, provided constitutional status to panchayats. From the point of view of development of women, the 73rd Constitutional Act actually

proved to be a milestone that provided reservation to women representatives on 33 percent seats in panchayats. Its main objective is to empower women politically. It was also decided that this reservation should not be for the benefit of women officers, but selected women can improve the standard of living of backward and Dalit women. The Act is not limited to providing reservation only to women, but seeks to ensure their greater participation. At the same time, providing reservation to those women also belongs to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward castes and also gives them equal opportunity to participate in decision making. Many types of doubts also come up in the context of women empowerment. Which creates many kinds of misconceptions. Do we really want to empower women? Wasn't there really any rules made for women's salvation before this? Will women really fight to get their political rights? How will women perform constitutional responsibility and perform their duties while a large percentage of them are still illiterate and have zero experience on the political horizon? How will they be able to reconcile in these changed circumstances? They will have to give more time for public meetings, even at night they may have to stay outside the house. Men will have to walk shoulder to shoulder; such decisions will also have to be taken which will often be against men. How will she work with the PRI institutions?

It has been almost a decade and a half since women got constitutional reservation in the Panchayati Raj system and now the need is to have an objective assessment of whether this political participation of women has led to the expected improvement in their status and whether in reality, are they empowered? If not, why? The present study is an attempt to answer many such questions. Our aim is to explore the ground reality of women's empowerment in the rural part of states of Uttar Pradesh.

## II. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The commitment of female equality is well established at the highest level of policy-making i.e. the Constitution of India. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard. Constitutional Privileges are-

- (i) Equality before law for women (Article 14).
- (ii) The State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them [Article 15 (i)].
- (iii) The State to make any special provision in favour of women and children [Article 15 (3)].
- (iv) Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State [Article 16].
- (v) The State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood [Article 39(a)].
- (vi) Equal pay for equal work for both men and women [Article 39(d)].
- (vii) To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities [Article 39 A].
- (viii) The State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief [Article 42].
- (ix) The State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation [Article 46].
- (x) The State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people [Article 47].
- (xi) To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women [Article 51(A) (e)].
- (xii) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat [Article 243 D(3)].
- (xiii) Not less than one-third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women [Article 243 D (4)].
- (xiv) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality to

be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality [Article 243 T (3)].

- (xv) Reservation of offices of Chairpersons in Municipalities for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the legislature of a State may by law provide [Article 243 T (4)].

### III. STATE PROGRAM FOR WOMEN DEVELOPMENT

Jawaharlal Nehru said while implementing the planning that the present society of India may have been governed by male-dominated and male-made laws, but the future of this country will be more based on women than men. Keeping this statement in view, for the development and upliftment of women, under each of the Five Year Plans, under certain schemes, various ministries directly or indirectly conducted programs based on women. Panchayati Raj Institutions formed in the name of democratic decentralization in India can provide meaningful momentum to rural development. The solution of national problems in India is the key to the socio-economic development of 29 subjects which have been included in the 11th Schedule of the Constitution through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment for the development of the entire country and the all round progress of rural areas.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment significantly linked women to decision-making in local institutions. A large number of women were elected in gram panchayats. In the 1995 Gram Panchayat elections, the number of women elected in Uttar Pradesh was 120591 out of total 799780 elected representatives. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment significantly linked women to decision-making in local institutions. A large number of women were elected in gram panchayats. In the 1995 Gram Panchayat elections, the number of women elected in Uttar Pradesh was 120591 out of total 799780 elected representatives.

The condition of women in India is mixed. Very few women have complete control over their situation. Most of the women are dependent on their father, husband, brother or sons to a large extent. Along with the view of society and men for women development, women themselves also have to change their perspective that there is existence as a human apart from family and house. This is possible only through wide awakening, education and economic empowerment. It has been a decade and a half since women got reservation in Panchayati Raj and the need is to study what is the reason that women empowerment has not been given meaning.

It has been a decade and a half since women got reservation in panchayati raj and the need is to study whether the reason why women empowerment is not given meaning.

### IV. Study:

Present study included 300 women from 20 years to 60 years in three Gram Sabha namely; *Sarsawan*, *Dashrathpur* and *Lilauli* in Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh. 63 percent of them are illiterate. Most of the women are housewives and 21 percent are agricultural laborers. They were asked many information related to Gram Panchayat, which is as follows.

**Table-01: Status of attending the meeting of Gram Sabha**

S. No.	Participation in Gram Sabha meetings	Gram Sabha			Total	percentage
		Sarsawan	Dashrathpur	Lilauli		
1.	Yes	06	05	20	31	10.3
2.	No	94	95	80	269	89.7
	Total	100	100	100	300	

It is clear from Table-01 that 89.7 percent women do not participate in important activity like Gram Sabha meeting. Whereas for the correct development of villages, it is necessary to attend the meetings of the Gram Sabha.

**Table-02: Awareness of the work of the Gram Sabha of the respondents**

S. No	What are Functions of Gram Sabha ?	Gram Sabha			Total	percentage
		Sarsawan	Dashrathpur	Lilauli		
1.	Selection of beneficiaries for poverty alleviation	20	19	28	67	22.3
2.	To plan the village development schemes	44	37	43	124	41.3
3.	To solve the problems of the villagers	18	22	30	70	23.3
4.	No idea	10	13	14	37	12-3
	Total	100	100	100	300	

**Table-03: Participation in the Panchayat elections of the respondents**

S. no	Candidature in panchayat election.	Why women did not participate in panchayat elections? If participated, what are the problems they faced?	Gram Sabha			Total	Percentage
			Sarsawan	Dashrathpur	Lilauli		
1.	No - 286 95.3 %	No Interest	73	46	66	185	61.67
		Have to run a lot which is not possible for women	08	27	19	54	18
		Illiterate	05	05	01	11	3.7
		Elections are expensive	06	08	02	16	5.3
		Corruption Fear	02	01	00	03	1.0
		This is Job of Males	01	01	0	02	0.67
		Family Reason	03	08	04	15	5
2.	Yes -14 3.7 %	No problem	02	02	02	06	2
		Exposure in Crowd	00	02	00	02	0.67
		So many problems	00	00	06	06	2
		Total	100	100	100	300	

It is clear from Table-02 that 37 women respondents are not aware about the functions of Gram Sabha. 124 respondents said that planning of village development is the main task of Gram Sabha, according to 70 respondents the function of Gram Sabha is to discuss and solve the problems of the villagers. Whereas, according to 67 women, the selection of beneficiaries for the eradication of poverty is the primary task of the Gram Sabha. Respondents have ignored many aspects of utilization of panchayat fund, population land and pasture etc.

Table-03 clarifies the candidature of women in panchayat elections. 286 respondents said that they had not been a candidate in the panchayat elections. In which 185 respondents were not interested in contesting, while 54 respondents were having problem and fear of excessive movement. Only 14 women respondents they have been candidates in the panchayat elections. This shows that despite of many effort of government women are not attracting toward panchayats. So there is a need to create favorable conditions for women in rural areas.

**Table-04: Discharge of the responsibilities of female panchayat representatives according to the respondents**

S. no	Responsibilities of panchayat discharged by			Gram Sabha			Total	Percentage
				Sarsawan	Dashrathpur	Lilauli		
1-	Companion	Why	House hold	68	63	48	179	59.7
			Herself not interested	08	00	10	18	6
			Illiterate	02	19	11	32	10.67
			Husband is overbearing	03	03	01	07	2.3
2-	Does it herself		10	10	28	48	16	
3-	Do not know		09	05	02	16	5.3	
	Total			100	100	100	300	

**Table-05: Participation of women's in panchayat elections**

S. No	How women participate in elections	Gram Sabha			Total	Percentage
		Sarsawan	Dashrathpur	Lilauli		
1.	In the selection of candidate	1	2	9	12	4
2.	To vote	85	95	88	268	89.3
3.	During election campaign	6	1	3	10	3.3
4.	In contest	2	0	0	2	0.7
5.	No participation (don't even vote)	6	2	0	8	2.7
	Total	100	100	100	300	

Table-04 explains the discharge of her duties as a female representative. 236 women say that even after electing a woman's representative, their obligations are fulfilled by their husband or any other male colleague. 179 women said that they do not fulfill their responsibilities due to house restrictions. While 32 women believe that they are illiterate. 18 women said that they do not have their own interest in fulfilling these duties and 07 women believe that their husbands are domineering which does not let them fulfill their obligations. On the other hand, 48 women are said to support the position of the representatives to fulfill their obligations while 16 women do not know who fulfills the obligations themselves or their partners.

It is clear from Table-05 that 268 female respondents participate in the panchayat elections by voting. While 12 women are in the election campaign, 02 women stand for election. Whereas 8 women say that they do not take any participation even they do not go to vote.

**Table-06: Seat base for women representatives**

Sr. No.	Is the female representative elected on the women's reserve seat	Gram Sabha			Total	Percentage
		Sarswan	Dashrathpur	Lilauli		
1.	yes	86	90	89	265	88.3
2.	No	04	00	02	06	2
3.	No Idea	10	10	09	29	9.7
	Total	100	100	100	300	

It is clear from Table-06 that when the respondents were asked whether the female representative was elected on the reserved seat or not, 265 respondents said that the female representative was elected only on the female reserved

seat. While 29 female respondents do not have any information about this. Therefore, it is clear that women got representation due to reserved seats. Most of the women say that when the panchayat seat is reserved for woman, the men make the daughter-in-law or wife of their house stand on the reserved seat. If there is no women reserved seat, then the chance of women standing in elections will be negligible.

## V. Conclusion

Despite many flaws in the Panchayati Raj system, its importance cannot be denied. The most important impact is that the Panchayati Raj system has emerged as a strong medium for women's participation. The efforts made by the government through the Panchayati Raj system for the empowerment of women in rural areas are still insufficient. Political empowerment among women through the Panchayati Raj is visible, but in the case of economic and social empowerment, this system does not show any remarkable effect. For this, it is necessary to empower the panchayats by giving them more powers. There is a need to increase the participation of panchayats especially in the primary education.

We also observe that it is impossible for women to show better effect due to reservation only in Panchayati Raj. It is necessary to create an environment at the local level so that women can participate in this process more effectively. Apart from this, more and more educational visits should be made to women representatives, which will increase their self-confidence when they observe the good work done by the panchayat representatives from elsewhere. So you will be motivated to move ahead and good works done by women representatives should be encouraged and propagated through local media. The Panchayati Raj Act has given women an opportunity to come forward in rural politics and have been politically empowered. This empowerment has not yet achieved the desired objective in the male dominated society, but it needs to be maintained with some reforms. The Panchayati Raj system has an important contribution in women empowerment. It will get good results over the time.

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