

An Analysis of the Role of Women in Panchayati Raj in Kanpur District

¹ Dr. Deepa Rawat, Dr. Priya Sauni²

¹ Associate Professor & Head, Department of Economics Agra College, Agra.

² U.G.C. Post Doctoral Fellow, Department of Economics, Agra College Agra.

Abstract : Empowerment of women and their direct political participation in local governance is a central human right in itself and enables the realization of a host of other human rights. Women empowerment in all spheres of life i.e economic social and political is crucial for their advancement and for the foundation of gender equal society. It is central to the goals of equality, development and peace.

Women Empowerment, political voice and decision-making power of women concerning basic services, economic development and social justice are critical factors in challenging and transforming structural discrimination of the caste, class and gender. The present paper is based on primary data, wherein, the villages with women pradhans in Kanpur district were visited and detailed knowledge about their working, status etc was acquired. The women pradhans were questioned with the help of an exhaustive questionnaire. We sincerely hope that there might be one day in the future when empowerment in the real sense would be achieved in all spheres of life.

IndexTerms - Women Empowerment , EWGPs, Gram Panchayats .

I. INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment is very essential factor for upliftment of socio-economic status and political status of women. The role of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions was made possible by the government through the historic 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992 which made mandatory 33 per cent reservation for women at every level. Further since 2009, the Union Cabinet of the Government of India approved 50 per cent reservation for women in Panchayat Raj Institutions. The states of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tripura were the first to implement 50 per cent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Since the 73rd amendment five elections of Panchayats have been conducted and the results of the earlier and the latest 2015 elections in UP show that there is widespread polarization. An analysis of involvement of women in PRIs shows that in majority of cases the women participation in general is more as a token i.e. the male leaders prop up wives or close female relatives as their surrogates and the actual powers and working rests with the males only. However a small number of success stories are also evident in which the female representatives proved to be epitomes of women empowerment and carried out the Gram Pradhans responsibilities independently and much better than their male counterparts elsewhere. Since the PRIs covers a number of accepted we have focused are study on the level of empowerment and the level of knowledge of the Elected Women Gram Pradhans.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present paper is based on primary data, wherein, the villages with women pradhans were visited and indepth knowledge about their working, status etc was acquired. The women pradhans were questioned with the help of an exhaustive questionnaire. The research methodology followed in this paper was as follows. There are in all 18 divisions in Uttar Pradesh, for the purpose of the study Kanpur division was selected. The districts in the division were placed in alphabetical order and the district at number one place was selected as such Auraiya District emerged. For the selection of development block in the selected district i.e. Auraiya, the list of blocks prepared by the Election Commission was used. We drew a lottery from the list of development blocks and in the process block at the serial number six was selected. The block that emerged was Sahaar.

TABLE 1: SELECTED DEVELOPMENT BLOCKS IN UTTAR PRADESH

DIVISION	DISTRICT	BLOCK	GRAM PANCHAYAT
Kanpur	Auraiya	Sahaar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ariyari • Purva Fakire • Jiva-Sirsani • Kichaiya Gopalpur • Devari • Purva Bale • Yakubpur • Pura Kalan • Sahayal • Shahbajpur

Finally 10 villages from Sahaar block having women gram pradhans were the subject of the study for this paper. Out of the selected Elected Women Gram Pradhans (EWGPs), 02 were represented by SC women pradhans, 03 by OBC women pradhans and the remaining 05 were general category women Gram Pradhans.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review is a measure stating the recent output on a particular area of research and organized in a helpful sequence to strengthen of research techniques. In the present study “**An Analysis of the Role of Women in Panchayati Raj in Kanpur District**” various papers and researches regarding the role of women in the democratic set-up and their involvement in the Panchayat raj Institutions have been analysed.

Budhi Sagar Mishra (2015) analyzed the impact of Democratic state policies, nature and effect in reference of women’s empowerment in different classes of society and each phase of society.

Sreekumar S.S. (2014) deals with capacity building efforts for elected representatives of the Panchayat Raj Institutions undertaken in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Capacity building efforts conducted in the Island territory both from the part of Government and NGOs have been presented.

Sivanna N and Gayathridevi K.G., (2012) examined the situation of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) at various levels political, social, economic and personal. More particularly, it aims to understand the ways in which the EWRs use their agency to address and negotiate issues like feminisation of invisibility, proxy governance and politics of exclusion.

Pramod K. Mishra (2008) analysed “Emerging Challenges on Reservation Policy of Panchayat Raj Institutions: The Case of Women Representatives in India” and discussed the gaps between theory and practice.

Patnaik (2005) finds out the participation of elected representatives belonging to weaker sections in the functioning of four gram Panchayats in Orissa’s Dhenkanal district, in order to observe the extent to which numerical representation has been successful in the actual exercise of power by these sections.

IV. PANCHAYATI RAJ IN UTTAR PRADESH

Uttar Pradesh brought in Panchayati Raj immediately after independence through the enactment of the UP Panchayat Raj Act, 1947. Following the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee a three-tier system of Panchayats was established through the enactment of the U.P. Kshetra Samitis and Zilla Parishads Act, 1961 (now, renamed as UP Kshetra Panchayats and Zilla Panchayats Adhiniyam, 1961). Following the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 in order to bring about conformity with the provisions of the Constitution, the Government of U.P. amended the aforesaid Acts, through the Uttar Pradesh Panchayat Laws (Amendment) Act, 1994.

The first Village Panchayat Act in Uttar Pradesh was enacted in 1920. Village level local bodies were set up to assist in the administration of civil and criminal justice, sanitation and other common concerns. However, the Panchs of the Panchayats set up under the Act were to be appointed by the Collector of the district, ruling out any chances of democratic self-government. Immediately after Independence, Uttar Pradesh enacted the United Provinces Panchayat Raj Act 1947 (also known as Uttar Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, 1947), which was signed by the Governor General on 7th December, 1947. Under this Act, three bodies were created Gaon Sabha, Gaon Panchayat, and Panchayat Adalat or Nyaay Panchayats. To begin with, around 35,000

Gaon Panchayats and 8,000 Nyaa Panchayats started functioning for nearly 5.4 crore (the then) rural population of Uttar Pradesh. Since then, the Panchayati raj Institution has strengthened and grown with time. The 2010, 2015 elections of PRI saw a remarkable contribution of women in the electoral process throughout India and also in Uttar Pradesh.

V. POLITICAL CAREER OF EWGPs

Empowerment of women is an important issue all over the world. This concept has its roots in the women's movement throughout the world. Empowerment as a concept was first introduced at the International Women's Conference in 1985 at Nairobi. In India despite many efforts by the Government for the women empowerment the real situation remains wildly skewed as still there is a wide and worrying gap between the political opportunities before Indian women and the lack of social and economic options which are reflected in their human development indicators. The sex ratio is highly imbalanced and stands at 944 to 1000 according to 2011 census; India ranks 108 out of 144 countries according to the Global Gender Gap Index 2015 which is just six positions higher compared to 2014. According to Global Gender Gap Report, 2017 India slipped by 21 places compared to 87th rank in 2016.

Direct political participation of women in local governance is a central human right in itself and enables the realization of a host of other human rights. It has important implications for the broader arena of governance in any country. Political voice and decision-making power of women concerning basic services, economic development and social justice are critical factors in challenging and transforming structural discrimination of the caste, class and gender, and enabling them to realize their fundamental rights. Political participation also demands accountability from state and non-state functionaries to guarantee and respect women's equal political voice and development. This requires a transformation of power relationships both within institutions of governance and in the women's social environment. Empowerment of women will not be possible unless they are provided proper representation in the political system.

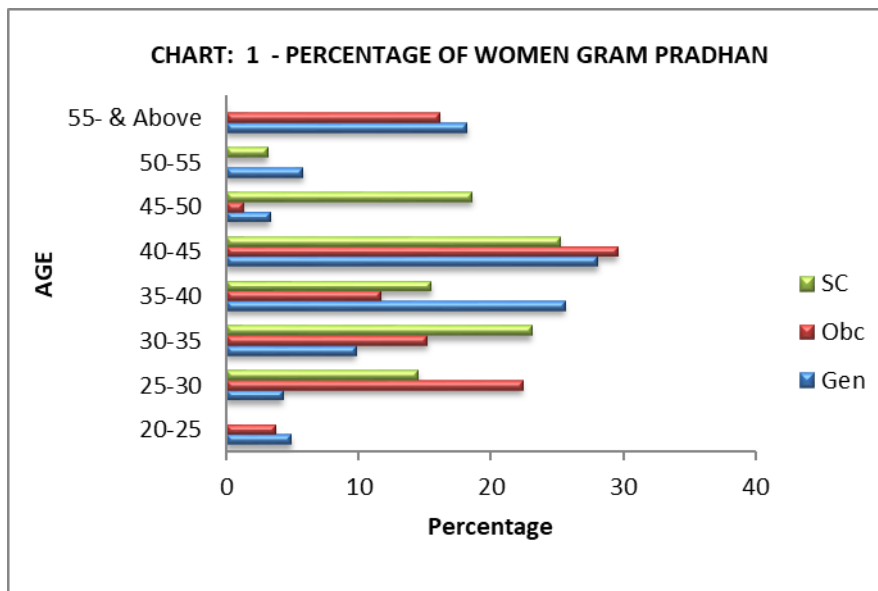
Various factors influence the opportunities available for women to enter into politics, Panchayati Raj Institution being the lowest rung of the democratic system in India, the participation of women in PRIs is very important. This study observed and analyzed various aspects of the political careers of Women Gram Pradhans, their age, motivating factors, constraints, family influence, freedom to work, awareness of duties and rights and their ability of decision making power. Reservation has given an opportunity to women of unprivileged groups in society who were aspiring for a political career but were in need of their first break. In this regard the 73rd amendment proved to be a revolutionary step in the right direction although the women who have come forward to contest elections have had to face a lot of problems not only politically, but also socially. Now it has become compulsory for men to allow women to come forward and contest elections although the reins of power are vested in men folk only.

5.1 AGE OF EWGPs

The age at which women first entered politics also plays a vital role in their level of empowerment and their role as Gram Pradhans.

**TABLE-2: AGE OF EWGPs WHEN FIRST CONTESTED ELECTED
AT GRAM PANCHAYAT LEVEL**

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN GRAM PRADHAN			
Age	Gen	OBC	SC
20-25	4.9	3.7	-
25-30	4.3	22.4	14.5
30-35	9.8	15.2	23.1
35-40	25.6	11.7	15.5
40-45	28.1	29.6	25.2
45-50	3.3	1.3	18.6
50-55	5.8	-	3.1
55- & Above	18.2	16.1	-
Total	100	100	100



The maximum number of EWGPs won their first elections in the age group of 40-45 years. About 29.6 percent of OBC EWGPs were in this age group maximum number in 23.1 Schedule Caste EWGPs consted in the age group 30-35 years. In the general category 28.1 percent first contested elections in the age group of 40-45 years and 25.6 percent in 30-35 years.

The study shows that women representatives' prior association with any form of politics was low and the provision of reservation played a very conclusive role in encouraging women to contest panchayat elections and brought many of them in the foray. Percentage of SC EWGPs in the group 25-30 years was 14.5 per cent as compared to 4.3 for general category and 22.4 a per cent for OBC category. It shows greater eagerness among marginalized group's younger generations to enter the politics. (Table 2)

National politics does not play a major role at village level; however local politics is always important even in the smallest of villages, the affiliation of the family with the influential persons of the village, block or the district decides the fate of the elected women representatives in general and Gram Pradhan in particular. It was observed in the study that out of 100 selected women Gram Pradhans only 3 have stated that the decision to contest the election was entirely their own. In 78 per cent cases it was the husband who decided that his wife will contest the election. In remaining 19 per cent cases, the decision was of other members of the family like father-in-law, brother, son etc. Thus the whole process of the election was male dominated by proxy.

Further 58 per cent said they did not face any problem at the time of filing their first nomination as the whole process was completed by their spouses or other family members. They simply put their thumb impressions or in some cases their signatures on the papers. Among the major constraints faced were the lack of financial resources (28 %) political rivalry of their spouse or family member (8 %), low educational level (14 %) and resistance related to caste or religion (9 %).

The survey revealed that 17-18 per cent of EWGPs convinced members of the community or the household to give their support and 12 per cent mobilised funds through relatives, friends or the community to meet election expenses. EWGPs who have served more than one term were further questioned about how, in their perception and with reference to the most recent election, these constraints had changed over a period of time. Around 57 per cent of them confirmed that there was a change, though 16 per cent said that it has remained the same. The gender difference on this issue was not significant.

VI. KNOWLEDGE OF EWGPs REGARDING SOURCES OF FUNDS .

The present study focused on the development aspect of the village in relation to the deployment of the funds. The EWGPs were asked about knowledge of various government programmes and schemes.

When asked about the resources of the funds received from the government for the development of villages, only about 20 per cent of the EWGPs could explain the exact nature of the source of funds. 18.75 per cent of general category, 31.5 per cent of OBC category and 13.33 per cent of SC category Women Gram Pradhan could spell out the exact source of the funds. In 78 per cent cases, the general answer was “सरकार से आता है” “Received from the Government”.

The Gram Panchayats do not have adequate financial resources of their own. Mobilization of local resources is almost negligible, about 95 per cent of the Gram Panchayats receive income from grants in aid in the form of devolution from the state on the recommendation of the State Finance Commission and from centre and state governments from sponsored schemes. Besides this 12th Finance Commission recommended the devolution of resources to the Gram Panchayats, the 13th Finance Commission followed the same practice. The 12th Finance Commission has recommended grants amounting to Rs. 20000 crores payable during the period 2005-10 for Panchayats to states. It was stipulated in the recommendations that grant should be used to improve the service delivery by the Panchayats in respect of water supply and sanitation. Panchyats were expected to encourage taking over water supply assets created under Swajal Dhara Programme with the help of these grants.

The 13th Finance Commission had realized that a sizable rural population especially the SCs and STs are deprived of clean and wholesome water supply and sanitation. The accelerated rural water supply programme, the total sanitation campaign and the Nirmal Gram Panchayat scheme have made a significant difference in the lives of rural people. However the numbers of villages have slipped from the „fully covered category“ for water supply “to uncovered” due to failure of the source or break down of the system. The problem of water supply was acute in Sahar (Auraiya), Fatehpur Sikri (Agra), Baghpat, Junavai (Badaun), and Kamasin (Banda).

The Fourteenth Finance Commission (2015-20) has recommended the grant of 2, 00,292.2 crore to Panchayats for the period 2015-20 and this entire amount of funds would go to Gram Panchayats. Out of this 90 per cent will be the basic grant and 10 per cent will be the performance grant. The FFC has recommended that the grants should go to gram panchayats, which are directly responsible for the delivery of basic services, without any share for other levels. The Commission has further observed that the State Governments are expected to take care of the needs of the other levels. The recommendations have been accepted by the Government of India.

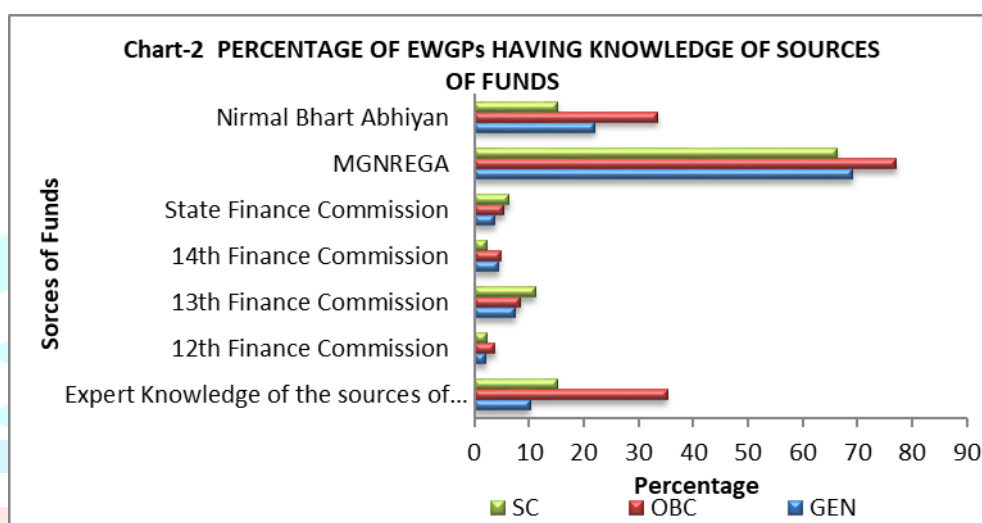
Panchayat have various sources of funds including taxes on various items. The normal Panchayat taxes are House or Property Tax, Profession Tax, Entertainment Tax, Surcharge on Stamp Duty, Tax on Goods sold in markets, Tax on Community Services, Water Tax, etc. There is a huge variation across States in the type of local taxes, rates and level of collection. Panchayats also generate resources through various types of fees and assets. According to the 12th Finance Commission the panchayat can generate their own revenue like levy of certain major taxes and exploitation of non-tax revenue sources. The minimum rates for all such levies are fixed by the State Governments.

According to the 14th Finance Commission: improvement in own source revenue generation is one of the two mandatory conditions for drawal of Performance Grants (applicable from 2016-17 onwards). These performance grants will be disbursed so as to enable sufficient time to State Governments and the local bodies to put in place a scheme and mechanism for implementation.

The flow of funds and availability of resources from the Finance Commission and State government is enough to carry out the basic works of the Panchayats. However it was observed that the EWGPs were not aware of the various sources of funds and had no system for accountability of resources. In most of the cases the government funds and Panchayat finances were managed by Pradhan Patis.

Table- 3: PERCENTAGE OF EWGPs HAVING KNOWLEDGE OF SOURCES OF FUNDS

S. No	Sources of funds	GEN	OBC	SC
1	Expert Knowledge of the sources of funds	10.25	35.26	15.2
2	12 th Finance Commission	2.12	3.81	2.33
3	13 th Finance Commission	7.55	8.5	11.2
4	14 th Finance Commission	4.5	4.8	2.3
5	State Finance Commission	3.77	5.44	6.4
6	MGNREGA	69.2	77.2	66.4
7	Nirmal Bhart Abhiyan	22.1	33.6	15.3



Thus in all, the sources of revenue for the Gram Panchayat comprised of

1. Grants assigned under the recommendation of 12th, 13th and 14th Finance Commission.
2. The recommendation of the 14th Finance Commission to share 42% of its net tax revenue with states during the five-year period starting 2015-16, up from the existing 32%.
3. Grants received through District Rural Development Agency for execution of centrally sponsored scheme such as MGNREGA.
4. Funds from departments for the functions transferred to the Panchayats.

Unfortunately only 3 per cent respondents could tell that their Gram Panchayats received some funds under 12th Finance Commission, and 5 per cent were able to disclose that their Gram Panchayats received funds under the 13th Finance Commission. But none of the respondents was able to explain the concept and functions of Finance Commission as stipulated in the Constitution of India. They were also not aware of the nature of funds distributed by the 14th Finance Commission. Almost the same trend was noticed regarding the funds received by the State Finance Commission. However 65 per cent respondents had knowledge about the funds received under MGNREGA and 22 per cent EWGPs were found to be aware of the funds received under “Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan”.

VII. CONCLUSION

The results of the study conducted in 10 villages of Sahaar block of Auraiya district in Kanpur division were not very different from any other district and block of Uttar Pradesh. The study show that the reservation for women in PRIs can be an important impetus to women empowerment in India at village level but still it is not a guarantee for participation of the elected women. The goal of women empowerment cannot be accomplished only by giving reservation. Other social, economic, political

and demographic factors also influence the EWGPs participation and work in local self-governance. To consolidate this process it is essential to implement some supplementary policies which encourage the self-confidence among women, build their negotiation skills and remove operational obstacles in their participation and decision making. On the basis of the present study it cannot be stated that women are fully empowered but at the same time it cannot at all be denied that they have gained a certain extent of authority and confidence as a direct outcome of the women reservation in Gram Panchayats.

The provision of reservation of seats in PRIs, although apparently laudable has merely inducted women in the political process and raised their status temporarily without revealing any desirable signs of their active participation in decision making in the interests of women. Even after getting 33 per cent to 50 per cent reservation, women are still facing a lot of obstacles which put hurdles in their participation. Though, there are no constitutional hindrances for women's political participation at grass root level or any other level of administration, in reality, various structural, functional, attitudinal and environmental constraints still exist which do not provide conducive environment for women's effective participation in PRIs.

To bring all the women force in the mainstream of development they should be made more conscious of their rights, their duties as well as the benefits that they can enjoy which are meant for them. They must be more politically conscious to ensure their complete participation in democracy. Thus, women have to be made more aware about their empowerment. Education plays a very significant role in this direction. Organizing camps, programmes on television and radio can bring a revolutionary change in the attitude, behaviour and working of elected women representatives. The government as well the NGOs can come forward to enlighten the rural women about their rights, about the framework of Panchayats and other institutions so that there is more active participation of rural women in democracy. This will no doubt help in making the objective of inclusive growth realistic, when the rural women will be empowered enough to understand their need in participation in democracy and confident enough to take their own decision, then we sincerely hope that there might be one day in the future when reservation may not be required to bring about women participation in democracy.

REFERENCE

- [1] Ministry of Panchayati Raj, GOI, New Delhi.
- [2] State Election Commission of India (2010).
- [3] Hindustan Times "Various Issues".
- [4] Indian Finance Commission, Finance Commission of India
- [5] Economic Survey 2016.
- [6] State Election Commission of India (2015).