
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN GRAM PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS IN JHARKHAND: A CASE STUDY OF SADAR BLOCK OF HAZARIBAG DISTRICT

DR.RITA KUMARI

Abstract: A developing democracy like India needs wider participation of the people irrespective of caste, colour, creed, sex etc. in its political process. In order to provide this opportunity, the system of democratic decentralization through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has long been introduced in our country. As the women constitute a very sizeable portion of the total population of India, their participation at grass root politics is so essential to make the democratic governance more successful. The question of their participation arises because of their long standing neglected social status in the male dominated Indian society. Immediately after framing of the Indian Constitution, constitutional safeguards along with the provision of reservation of seats in legislative bodies, public offices and public educational institutions, were, therefore, provided to them for their uplift.

Panchayati Raj Institutions have always been considered as a means to good governance and 73rd Constitutional Amendment was effected in the hope that it would lead to better governance and provide political space to the disadvantaged sections of the society like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Women. The present study was an effort to know the extent of political participation of women in functioning as well as in the electoral process of the panchayats and the problems faced by them. In this regard, sample consisted of 20 women elected members from 6 gram panchayats of Sadar Block in Hazaribag District of Jharkhand. The study was conducted in September-october 2013. The findings of the study revealed that political participation of women in the electoral process of the panchayats is rather satisfactory, but so far as the case in state assembly and Member of Parliament election is concerned, women have great apathy towards politics. The male dominant society, culture and low level of education are greatly responsible for the backwardness of women.

Keywords: democratic decentralization, Electoral Process, governance, Panchayati Raj.

Introduction: A developing democracy like India needs wider participation of the people irrespective of caste, colour, creed, sex etc. in its political process. In order to provide this opportunity, the system of democratic decentralization through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has long been introduced in our country. As the women constitute a very sizeable portion of the total population of India, their participation at grass root politics is very essential to make the democratic governance more successful. The question of their participation arises because of their long standing neglected social status in the male dominated Indian society. Immediately after framing of the Indian Constitution, constitutional safeguards along with the provision of reservation of seats in legislative bodies, public offices and public educational institutions, were, therefore, provided for their upliftment.

In Hazaribag district of Jharkhand, women constitute a very little bit less than 50 percent i.e 48.8%, of the district's total population. Despite some favorable traditional values and customs and emergence of powerful women personalities, the position of the women is not very rosy. Their socio-economic status is, however, relatively low and they are discriminated in all walks of life. For centuries, women have been confined to home and suppressed and deprived of their rights to get a fair treatment from the male dominated society.

Concept Of Political Participation: Political participation simply refers to the way through which the citizens of a country take part in the electoral as well as in policy making process. In other words, political participation is a way or a process through which the

aspirations and needs of the people can be represented. Generally, the term "political participation" refers to those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and directly or indirectly in the formation of public policy. These activities include casting votes, seeking information, holding discussions, attending meetings, staging strikes and demonstrations, communicating with the legislators and the like. According to Herbert Mc. Closky, "Participation is the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and the rulers are made accountable to the ruled."¹ Political philosophers like J.S. Mill, Rousseau and Bentham have strongly advocated the need for participation of people in different spheres of political life. As *Noorjahan Bava* puts it, "direct and indirect participation of citizens in public affairs is the lifeline of a participatory democracy."²

As women constitute a crucial segment of the human resources in the society, due importance has to be accorded to the role and contribution of women in the various socio-economic, political and cultural activities. Unfortunately, despite the numerical strength, the role of women has been grossly underplayed and the developmental efforts by the government have only ensured further marginalization of women in the development process. It is an established fact that Indian women, in spite of the constitutional and legal safeguards are still in the process of struggling for equality of status and equality of participation in the development process.

Subordination of women to men in the home, in work place and in politics is a dominant socio-political reality

that has its origin in the past The relationship between men & women was “grounded on force” and the law of the strongest has been the phenomena in their relationship. The notion that men are the natural masters of women has continued to hinder the progress of an egalitarian society when women enjoy an equal status³. Generally husbands, family members and villagers influence the women representatives in taking decisions and in most cases women representatives are housewives, first time entrants into politics and most of them are educated up to middle level. In few cases it was found that women representatives contest for election due to family pressure and also the decision of their community and not because of their own interest, women entered into politics due to mandatory provision of reservation or pressure from their family members or pressure from their village community.

Past Research: A number of literatures and so many research works have already been done in this field. *S.Panda (1996)*⁴ in her study of Village Panchayats in Orissa found that women entered into politics due to mandatory provision of reservation or pressure from their family members or pressure from their village community. *Manikyamba (1990)*⁵ in her study of Andhra Pradesh found that socio-economic background in general and political background in particular are important determinants of shaping the nature and level of participation of women members in political institutions and her study concludes that the participation of poor women members is mostly found insignificant. *Dr. Sing (2004)*⁶ presents the findings of an empirical study of the elected women representatives of the PRIs of Haryana for exploring the extent of their empowerment as a result of the implementation of 73rd Amendment Act

However, in this regard, my study tries to highlight on the awareness, interest and involvement of women in Panchayat administration and panchayat election.

Objectives Of Study: The main objectives of this study are:

1. To know about how far and to what extent, the rural women participate in the electoral process of gram panchayat and other elections (state assembly and parliament elections);
2. To explore the awareness, interest, and involvement of women in Gram Panchayat elections;
3. To know the leadership qualities of women;
4. To analyze the % of women actively participated in politics and became a PRI elected members.

Methodology And Sample Coverage: The present study is mostly based on empirical methods. For this study, schedules were employed to collect data from the sample respondents. Datas were also collected from the secondary sources like Census Reports, Government Documents, District Handbooks and other published literatures.

As it is quite impossible to study the political participation of all the women of the district, so only one Block, i.e., Sadar Block is selected where are 25

GPs, and 223 member of village panchayats. Out of above only 6 GPs i.e. Silwar kala, Meru, Sindur, Lakhe, Oriya and Morangi have been selected on random basis. Again, from these 6 GPs, I have selected 120 sample respondents, 20 sample respondents from each GP.

Constitutional Provisions And Policies For Women: Immediately after the framing of the Indian Constitution, certain provisions have been made in the Constitution in order to make them equal with their male counterparts. The Preamble of Indian Constitution recognizes the principles of social, economic and political justice to all its citizens and also equality of status and of opportunity and to promote among them all. *The Fundamental Rights* as guaranteed by the Constitution (Part III, Articles 12-35) tries to remove inequalities which Indian women had suffered a lot. In this regard, Article 14 promises equality before the law and equal protection by the laws. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race caste, sex or place of birth and also provides that the state may make special provisions for women and children. Besides these important provisions in the Fundamental Rights, some guidelines are also given in the *Directive Principles of State Policy (Part-IV, Articles. 36-51)* which are non-justiciable. *Article 51(e) (Fundamental Duties, Part IVA 42nd Amendment Act, 1976)* directs the state to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women. Besides these provisions, some seats are reserved for women in legislative bodies starting from grass root institutions to the Union Parliament. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts (1992) facilitating women participation in Panchayat Raj system are as follows.

- i) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct elections in every Panchayat to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat [Article 243D(3)].
- ii) Not less than one-third of the total number of offices of chairperson in the Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women [Article 243D (4)].
- iii) 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 seats to be filled by direct election in every municipality to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by to different constituencies in a municipality [Article 243(3)].
- iv) Reservation of offices of chairpersons in Municipalities for the Scheduled Castes scheduled tribes and the women in such a manner as the legislature of a state may by law provide [Article 243T(4)].⁷

Rural Local Governance And Women Participation: Soon after the creation of Jharkhand state, the Government of Jharkhand enacted Jharkhand Panchayat

Raj Act in 2001. For the purposes of this Act their shall be constituted - 1. Gram Panchayat for a village, 2. Panchayat Samiti for a Block, and 3. Zila Parishad for a district.

At present, Jharkhand has three-tier system of rural local self government system- the first tier being at the village level i.e. Gram Panchayat, the second tier at the Block level i.e. Panchayat Samiti and the third at the district level i.e. Zilla Parishad and 1/3rd of seats for women has been reserved in all the tiers.⁸ The present Panchayati

Raj structure of Jharkhand includes 22 Zilla Parishads , 212 Panchayat Samitis , 4,118 Gram Panchayats having total of 40471elected Members constitute the rural local governance system.⁹

So far as the abstract of total elected representatives of rural local governance system along with women elected representatives in Hazaribag district of Jharkhand to the rural local governance system during the Panchayat General Elections 2010 are analysed & appended in Table 1 below-

Table.1 General Panchayat Election,2010-status of women participation in Hazaribag

PRI Elected Members	Total PRI Elected Members	Scheduled Caste Women	Scheduled Tribe Women	Backward Class Women	General Women	Total Elected Women Members
Village panchayat Member	2,577	322	71	386	758	1537
Mukhiya	237	2	12	32	65	135
Panchayat Samiti Member	80	9	2	13	22	46
Zilla Parishad Member	25	3	1	3	7	14
Total % Elected Member	2,919	336 11.5%	86 2.9%	434 14.9%	852 29.2%	1732 59.34%

(Source: 2010, State Election Commission, Jharkhand,Ranchi)⁹ & ¹⁰

From the above table, it is found that during 2010 General Panchayat Elections, out of 2,919 elected PRI members; women constitute 1,732 of the total elected members. It means more seats than 33.33% i.e,1732-33.33% of 2919=759 seats or 26%. We can say that in PRI elections if only in Hazaribag district 759 women won beating male candidates from reserved unreserved seats, then what about rest of Jharkhand ? It will also become unfair in forgetting the losing women candidate, though I have no data for that, which shows the political potential of Hazaribag district. It can be said that Hazaribag district may be treated as most women participation district. It's essential to mention that in Jharkhand 1/3rd seats are reserved separately for SC/ST/OBC/general category.

In 2011, Jharkhand had witnessed Panchayat elections for the first time in three long decades. The Jharkhand Panchayat Act, 2001 has a provision for 1/3rd women's reservation. But history was created when women contested and won in 59.3%(Jharkhand 56%) seats. As per Rajgadia, "Interestingly, women also contested from unreserved seats as well and won handsomely. This has helped build up their confidence and they can now think of wresting their due position in local politics."

Women-headed Panchayats are now taking seriously issues that were once dismissed as "trivial". For instance, Archana Mahato of Muramkala Panchayat in Ramgarh block of Ramgarh district (formerly in Hazaribag district) has taken up local irrigation. Thanks to her efforts to get wells dug in four villages, vegetable cultivation in these villages has increased. To

compensate for the use of electricity to distribute water for household purposes and vegetable farming, the Panchayats have fixed a water tax for those who are willing to pay. The Panchayats now have four water pumps as well through which groundwater is pumped out. Since electricity supply is irregular a generator has been installed at the well. Villagers of Muramkala are getting regular drinking water from elevated water tower and more interesting is that, committee under mukhiya Archana Mahato is maintaining whole water supply scheme.

Socio-Economic Profile of Women: While studying socio-economic background of the respondents, age & education are taken as important factors

Table No.2 Age wise distribution of Respondents: (N=120)

Age Group	Number	Percentage (%)
Young Age (18-35)	49	41%
Middle Age (36-50)	51	42.5%
Aged (Above 50)	20	16.5%
Total	120	100%

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

The above table shows that majority of the women were from the middle aged category (42.5%) followed by young age category (41%) those who participated in panchayat elections and panchayat affairs. Only 16.5% were from aged category. It is quite clear from the above data that the aged women have some sort of apathy

towards politics whereas young and middle aged women are more interested in politics.

Table No.3 Educational Qualifications of the Respondents: (N=120)

Educational Qualification	Number	Percentage (%)
Illiterate	30	25%
Primary	37	31%
Middle	31	26%
High School and Above	22	18%
Total	120	100%

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

The data of above Table shows that majority of women were primary level (31%), followed by middle level (26%), illiterate(25%), and only 18% to High School level and 4% had a graduate and/or post-graduate education. This picture proves that education is very much essential for the women of this area in order to participate themselves in politics

In order to know the electoral participation of women in Gram Panchayat elections, I have taken the same 120 sample respondents in total and collected the required information from the women . In this context, the two question were asked from respondents shown in the table below.

Table 4- Participation of Women in Panchayat Election: (N=120)

Question from respondents	Response		Percentage	
	Yes	No	Yes (%)	No (%)
1. Did you participate in the electoral process of the last Panchayat election?	102	18	85%	15%
2. Did you participate in the electoral process of the last assembly & Lok Sabha elections	50	70	42%	58%

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

Though Gram Panchayats are created as grass root democratic institutions and election to these bodies are the first political experience for the women, still there is no cent percent electoral participation of women but can be said to be more than satisfactory,. From the above micro study, it is found that 85% of women participated in Panchayat election where as 15% of women remained as non participants.But regarding the participation in the last assembly & Lok sabha elections,the matter is just opposite. Women show less interest than panchayat elections here, it is found that 42% of women participated in Panchayat election where as 58% of women remained as non participants.It may be said that 85% of women who voted in Panchayat elections only 42% of them turned in MLA&MP

elections.It means they do not take interest in the electoral process, they are very ignorant about the electoral system or may be concluded that they are the mere instruments in the hands of the male leaders.

Political awareness is the stepping-stone of political participation. Awareness creates interests and interest creates involvements and it is therefore, the intension of the present study to investigate to what extent the women are aware about the electoral process.

Table No.5 Awareness of Women: (N=120)

Sl	Questions from Respondents	sayin g'yes'	(%) yes
1	Do you know that a citizen of 18 years age can vote in the election?	118	98%
2	Do you know that elections are conducted in every five years?	101	84%
3	Do you know the various scheme for the benefit of women	72	60%
4	Do you know that when U are 25 yrs of age U can contest election?	90	75%
5	Do you agree there is transparency in the selection,allotment & implementation of schemes in your Gram Panchayat ?	54	45%
6	Do you know that seats are reserved for women in Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samitis, and Assemblies & Parliament?	120	100%

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

From the above table, it reveals that women have moderate & satisfactory awareness regarding the electoral process of the Gram Panchayats. They have good knowledge about the voting age, the period of elections, and the reservations of seats for women in Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, Assemblies and Parliament. So, from this survey, we are quite clear that long after independence of India, the women are now gaining awareness about the electoral process of the country. The present study also intends to investigate the interaction between the women and Gram Panchayats. The following table shows the pattern of interaction between women and the members of GPs.

Sl.	Questions	Regularly(%)	Sometimes(%)	Never (%)
1.	Have you ever put forth your demands before the Gram Panchayat?	18 (15%)	32 (27%)	65 (58%)
2.	Do the Gram Panchayat members meet U?	12 (10%)	26 (22%)	90 (68%)
3.	Do you attend the meeting of Gram Sabha?	18 (15%)	34 (28%)	78 (57%)
4.	Do you think that yours demands are always fulfilled by the Gram Panchayat?	11 (9%)	24 (20%)	80 (71%)

(Source: Personal Communication/Survey)

The above table shows that the women are less satisfied with the performance of the Gram Panchayat and so far as their participation in gram sabha is concerned, it is very low.

Analysis Of The Findings:

- To analyze all the data collected from the respondents in this survey it is quite evident that some of the women rarely participate in the electoral process or in the affairs of the Gram Panchayats.
- This study shows that women have moderate awareness about the electoral process and they have less idea regarding schemes for their beneficiaries,.
- During the survey a very interesting thing have been collected from the same respondents who participated in the last panchayat elections and assembly & Lok sabha elections, the result is just opposite. Same women show less interest in assembly & Lok sabha than panchayat elections. It is found that 85% of of women participated in Panchayat election whereas only 42% of same women participated in assembly & Lok sabha elections..It may be assumed that half of women do not take interest in the electoral process of assembly & Lok sabha ,they are very ignorant about the electoral system or may be concluded that they are the mere instruments in the hands of the male leaders. In other words, they are the mere instruments in the hands of the political parties. As their responses show, by political participation they simple understand casting votes. Though they are regarded as voters, they don't know the value of votes.
- Some women complains that, what is the need of attending Gram sabha ? In Gram sabha, particular dominant group remains active and they do what they want.
- Their interaction with the gram panchayat is quite less and they rarely put their demands before the Gram Panchayat about the facilities and privileges meant for them. This is because of their lack of

consciousness and low levels of education .

- Regarding transparency in the selection, allotment & implementation of schemes in your Gram Panchayat, about 2/3 rd of participants claims no transparency.

So, in the light of the above analysis, it is quite obvious that a number of reasons are responsible for their apathy, less interest and indifference attitude towards political participation. The reasons like illiteracy, poverty, traditional pattern of society, narrow attitude of the members of the family and to some extent, the irresponsible and neglected attitude of the Gram Panchayat. As a result, the women in this block, not only politically, but also socially, economically, culturally and educationally are not so backward as we think of past.

Conclusion: As the objective of this survey is concerned, it is found that the participation of women in the affairs of the Panchayat administration is not up to the mark as compared to their male counterparts. The awareness, interest and involvement of women in Gram Panchayat election is above satisfactory. Mere inclusion of political reforms, constitutional provisions & rights are not enough; the issue is very critical, and, it requires introspection by women at first hand and of course by men. It is only through a new way of thinking, a broad perspective of analysis, an objective approach, a rational stream of thoughts irrespective of gender; we can think some degree of change. Political participation of women demands the values of equality and justice in daily life, the support of citizens groups in protest against oppressions, and acceptance of the feminist perspective in the public sphere. Women have to recognize, collectively and critically, the forces that limit them and to work collectively and continuously to change the unequal power structure. The family, community and state should together create a situation wherein elected women representatives act effectively in PRIs. They need to be endowed with capacities and incentives to tackle the emerging challenges after entering into PR system. More favorable environment should be created which

would enable the women to play more effective role in the decentralized development. Above all, the Gram Panchayats should act more actively and vigorously for

the development of women in order to realize them the benefits of rights, equality and justice as enshrined in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution.

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Assistant. Professor (senior scale),
Univ. Dept. of Political Science,
Vinoba Bhave University, Hazaribag (Jharkhand) india
Email address- drrita37@gmail.com