

# Analysis of Attitude and Participation of Women Sarpanches in Panchayati Raj Institutions: Study of Punjab, India

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**Abstract:** In India women were always subject to various atrocities. They had been denied their fundamental role in political and social participation and decision making process for centuries. Since independence, a need was felt to take various steps to improve their social, economic and political status in the country; it includes various kinds of reservation for this section, in educational and political field. At present, the Panchayati Raj System has become a major channel of popular participation in the process of development and political empowerment of women. The PRIs are expected to play a multifaceted role, a vehicle for political education and training in leadership. It helps to understand their participation, attitude and main hurdles they face in the political process. This study is on elected women Sarpanches /Village Panchayat Pardhans of three blocks namely: Mahilpur, Garshankar and Hajipur of district –Hoshiarpur, Punjab.

**Keywords:** Women Sarpanch, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Awareness, Reservation, Participation, Decision Making Process, Planning.

[This research paper is output of the ongoing research project titled “**Women Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions: A Case study of District Hoshiarpur, Punjab**” under the scheme of IMPRESS sponsored by ICCSSR, New Delhi] We are thankful for financial assistant from ICSSR and MHRD, New Delhi.

## Introduction

Women constitute around fifty percent of total population in the world including India, but they share a low presence in elected bodies. In order to remove gender imbalance and this bias, the constitution of India provides reservation for women in Local Self Government under the Article 243-D of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. This act stipulates that at least 33 percent of the seats and positions have to be filled up by women. By doing so, women will realize that they have been an important part of the decision making process in the local self government (Singh and Singh, 2015:143). It leads to empowerment of the women and enhance their status in society in terms of social, economic and political conditions which facilitate and encourage their participation in the public activities. This brings a sea change in the position of women, as these institutions make them participate in the political and social settings exercising their power of articulation and voting. Empowerment and participation are interconnected. The term women empowerment is used for giving power to women. It also includes political participation and acquiring the capabilities to influence the political decisions effectively, (Malik in Chahar, 2005:182). At present the Panchayati Raj

System has become a major channel of popular participation in the process of development and political empowerment of women.

The government of Punjab also established the PRIs under Punjab Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 with elected bodies at the village, block and district level. Reservation for women is provided at all three levels of panchayats under the State Panchayati Raj Act, 1993 in conformity with Article 243(D) of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act 1993. In Punjab, 2017 onwards reservation limit is increased to fifty percent for women in these Institutions. The real worth of women reservation can be judged from their participation in Panchayat affairs, which is not up to expected mark in the state. At present, fifty percent women are elected as Member/ Panch and chairperson/Sarpanch of these institutions. This research paper deals with the participation of women Sarpanches in Panchayati Raj and political process, as well. It also tries to find out the main hurdles faced by women during political participation. Besides, views of elected women Sarpanches regarding reservation is also discussed in this paper. For this purpose, researcher collected the data from three selected blocks namely: Mahilpur, Garshankar and Hajipur of District –Hoshiarpur, Punjab.

### Types of Respondents

The researcher collected data from all of the selected, 120 respondents (Women Sarpanches) of the Gram Panchayats in the studied area of three blocks of District Hoshiarpur, Punjab. First of all researcher discussed the types of respondents who are interviewed in this study.

**Table-I.1**  
**Types of Respondents**

Sr. No	Types of Respondents	No of Respondents
1	Sarpanches (Mahilpur)	48
2	Sarpanches (Garshankar)	42
3	Sarpanches (Hajipur)	30
	Total	120

Source: Field Survey

Table-1.1 shows the types of respondents i.e. elected Sarpanches from three locks namely Mahilpur, Garshankar and Hajipur, District –Hoshiarpur, Punjab. In this study the researcher interviewed 120 Women Sarpanches from all three selected blocks. In which forty eight Panchayats from Mahilpur block, forty two Panchayats from Garshankar block and thirty Panchayats from Hajipur block were selected for the in-depth study.

### Knowledge about Panchayati Raj Act

For a common man, it is hard to understand the meaning of certain rules and regulations formed by the government. Similar is the case of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act. Rural people of the District-Hoshiarpur in Punjab are less aware about the Act, although they are aware about the word reservation given by the government. Rural women Sarpanches of all these selected blocks if asked about the reservation given by the government they are aware about it but when asked about the 73rd Amendment Act they are less aware about it.

Table-I.2

## Are you aware about the Panchayati Raj Act?

Are you aware about the Panchayati Raj Act			
Designation	Yes	No	Total
Sarpanch	96	24	120
	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

Table-1.2 shows that the majority of Sarpanches are aware about the Panchayati Raj Act. In all three blocks 80 percent women respondents are aware about it but 20 percent women Sarpanches expressed ignorance about the knowledge of Panchayati Raj Act. Analysis of the data shows that it is due to the lack of awareness and knowledge about the Act among the rural masses.

**Reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions**

Political reservation for women in legislature bodies has become one of the most contentious issues of political discourse in contemporary India. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment introduced 33 percent reservation of women in panchayats and local governing bodies. This provision has opened up various avenues for women to exercise their leadership role at the local level (Louis in Sinha, 2008:437).

Table-I.3

## Do you think the reservation helped women in active Participation in PRIs?

Do you think the reservation helped women in active participation in PRIs			
Designation	Yes	No	Total
Sarpanch	98	22	120
	81.7%	18.3%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

Analysis of the data in table-1.3 shows that 81.7 percent respondents accepted that reservation helped women to take part in the functions of PRIs like, in Panchayat meetings, raising their views and expressing their opinion on crucial issues relating to the development of their area. Compulsory reservation has made them to become part of the political process at grassroot level, which was male dominated area in the past. Besides, it was found that 18.3 percent of respondents were hesitant in expressing themselves regarding the functioning of PRIs, due to lack of confidence and knowledge about the PRIs.

**Women's participation increased in PRIs after 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act**

This is only 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act of 1994 which has enabled women to become part of grassroot level politics. This has brought revolutionary change in grassroot level politics everywhere, including district – Hoshiarpur.

Table-I.4

Do you feel after the 73rd Amendment Act women's participation in PRIs increased?

Do you feel after the 73rd Amendment Act women's participation in PRIs increased			
Designation	Yes	No	Total
Sarpanch	105	15	120
	87.5%	12.5%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

Analysis of data in table-1.4 reveals that 87.5 percent women Sarpanches responded that participation of women is boosted after the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act and reservation helps women in active participation, while 12.5 percent women Sarpanches did not support the opinion. So, it may be said that after the implementation of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act, the new Panchayati Raj system strengthened the democratic decentralization and ensured the effective contribution of rural masses in decision making.

#### Attendance of PRIs meetings

Attendance in meetings is one of the important indicators to study the role and participation of women in activities of PRIs. Policy making and planning is done in such meetings. So, it has been necessary to record how often these members attend meetings.

Table-I.5

Do the women members attend meetings of PRIs Regularly?

Do the women members attend meetings of PRIs regularly				
Designation	Yes	No	Sometime	Total
Sarpanch	86	4	30	120
	71.7%	3.3%	25.0%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

An analysis of table- 1.5 shows that 71.7 percent women Sarpanches attended meetings regularly. The members have opined that attending the meeting of Panchayat is essential as they get information on many issues. This is beneficial for them. However, 25 percent women Sarpanches said that they have not attended the meetings regularly and 3.3 percent have not attended the meetings at all. The analysis of the table shows that the reason of their absence and irregular presence in these meetings is due to domestic work, sickness and other traditional factors of the society.

Table-I.5 (A)

Is there any proxy presence of male member of the family in the Panchayat Meetings?

Is there any proxy presence of male member of the family in the Panchayat meetings				
Designation	Regularly	Sometime	Never	Total
Sarpanch	2	17	101	120
	1.7%	14.2%	84.2%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

Table-1.5(A) shows that it is good that 84.2 percent elected women Sarpanches responded that they had attended meetings on their own. The table reveals that mere 1.7 percent women Sarpanches admit that the meetings were attended by their husbands or other male member of their home regularly. Besides, 14.2 percent responded that sometimes male members attend the meetings. Analysis of the data shows that majority of the female Sarpanches attend the meetings by their own.

### Speaking at meetings

Panchayati Raj Institutions are the smallest unit of democratic set up in rural areas. They are a pivotal unit in the decentralized planning process. These institutions allow the rural population to participate physically in the process of local self government and be stakeholders in the decision making process.

Table-I.6

Do you ask questions on various issues in the meetings of PRI's?

Do you ask questions on various issues in the meetings of PRI's				
Designation	Yes	No	Sometime	Total
Sarpanch	89	7	24	120
	74.2%	5.8%	20.0%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

Analysis of the data in table- 1.6 shows that 74.2 percent of the women Sarpanches responded that they raised questions on various issues related to the development of their area, in the meetings. While 20 percent women Sarpanches accepted that sometimes they raise questions related to the various issues and around 6 percent haven't raised any questions. These meetings also provide a platform to elected women members of these institutions to interact with the common villagers.

Table-I.6 (A)

Do you feel opinion and suggestions heard given by women in the meetings of PRIs?

Do you feel opinion and suggestions heard given by women in the meetings of PRIs				
Designation	Yes	No	Sometime	Total
Sarpanch	72	8	40	120
	60.0%	6.7%	33.3%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

Analysis of the data in table- 1.6 (A) reveals that 60 percent of women Sarpanches in Gram Sabha explained that they had put forth their voice strongly in the Gram Sabha meetings, opinion and suggestions heard given by them, however, 6.7 percent women Sarpanches denied the same. Out of these, 33.3 percent women Sarpanches agreed that opinion and suggestions given by them heard sometimes.

### Attitude of Panchayats towards women

At Panchayat level, a Sarpanch has always been a key factor in the decision making of their respective areas. It is well known fact that right from the beginning, head of the institutions have been playing key role in the overall functioning of the institutions. Considering orthodox and caste dominated society in India, it was inquired from women Sarpanches that what kind of support they are getting from remaining members of the Institutions.

**Table-I.7**

**What is the attitude of Panchayats towards women?**

What is the attitude of Panchayats towards women					
Designation	Negative	Supportive	Good	Indifferent	Total
Sarpanch	3	106	11	0	120
	2.5%	88.3%	9.2%	0.0%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

Analysis of the data in table- 1.7 reveals that, 88.3 percent women Sarpanches explained that panchayat is supportive, whereas, 9.2 percent women Sarpanches commended that rest of panchayat were good towards women. This indicates that, though majority of Panchayats support their female heads yet 2.5 percent Sarpanches expressed lack of confidence on them.

### Problems faced by the women

**Table-I.8**

**What type of problems you face when you take part in the elections of PRIs?**

What type of problems you face when you take part in the elections of PRIs					
Designation	Social	Political	Economic	Any other problem	Total
Sarpanch	10	8	4	98	120
	8.3%	6.7%	3.3%	81.7%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

Table- 1.8 shows that 8.3 percent women respondents explained that they have faced social problems and 6.7 percent women Sarpanches responded that they faced political problems only 4 percent women respondents responded that they have faced economic problems on the other hand 81.7 percent women respondents explained that they have faced another problems apart from social, political and economic. Analysis of the data shows that majority of the women respondents have not faced any social, political and economic problems rather they face other type of problems like lack of security, lack of information and knowledge about government programmes due to illiteracy, communication problem and due to the lack of exposure

and experience because majority of women enters in politics through reservation that's why women have less exposure and knowledge about the politics.

Table-I.8 (A)

**Do you face any type of discrimination in routine functioning in Panchayats?**

Do you face any type of discrimination in routine functioning in Panchayats			
Designation	Sometime	Never	Total
Sarpanch	8	112	120
	6.7%	93.3%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

Table- 1.8 (A) shows that as per the survey 93.3 percent women Sarpanches reported that there is no discrimination or isolation by the Gram Panchayat members in routine functioning of Panchayats. Whereas, 6.7 percent women Sarpanches responded that sometimes they have faced discrimination and isolation by the GP in the routine functioning of the Panchayats

### **Domination of the male members in decision making process**

As already known, Gram Sabha is not only a vital part of democracy at village but also a significant platform of decentralization and development activities of Panchayati Raj institutions. It provides a suitable platform for participation and planning various issues.

Table-I.9

**Do you think there is domination of the male member in decision making process?**

Do you think there is domination of the male members in decision making process				
Designation	Yes	Sometime	Never	Total
Sarpanch	9	17	94	120
	7.5%	14.2%	78.3%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

Table- 1.9 show interesting fact that 78.3 percent women Sarpanches reported that their male counterparts had supportive attitude towards them. This is a remarkable sign of a healthy working environment in a Panchayat. However, there is also another picture where 14.2 percent female respondents explained that their male counterparts do dominate them sometimes and 7.5 percent respondents always felt dominated. Therefore, an analysis shows that there is need to change in the traditional outlook of the society.

### **Control of State Government over PRIs**

Table-I.10

**Do you think the State Government still exercises effective control over the PRIs?**

Do you think the State Government still exercise effective control over the PRIs				
Designation	Yes	Sometime	Never	Total
Sarpanch	111	7	2	120
	92.5%	5.8%	1.7%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

Table- 1.10 shows that around 93 percent women Sarpanches replied that still the State Government exercise effective control over the functions of the PRIs. Only, 1.7 percent women respondents responded that the

State Government did not interfere in the activities of PRIs. Besides, there are 5.8 percent women Sarpanches who replied that sometimes state Government interfere in the activities of the PRIs. Overall analysis of the data shows that majority of the respondents responded that the State Government still have control over the activities of the PRIs.

### Views regarding existing rural development schemes

Table-I.11

Are you satisfied with the existing rural development schemes?

Are you satisfied with the existing rural development schemes					
Designation	Yes	No	Partial	Less	Total
Sarpanch	99	4	17	0	120
	82.5%	3.3%	14.2%	0.0%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

Table-1.11 table shows that 82.5 percent women Sarpanches responded that they are satisfied with the existing rural development programmes at PRIs. Only 3.3 percent women respondents replied that they are not satisfied with the same. Besides, there are 14.2 percent women Sarpanches who are partially satisfied with the existing rural development plans. Analysis of the data in table no 1.11 shows that majority of the women Sarpanches are satisfied with the existing rural development plans.

### Training under PRI capacity building programme

The level of performance while taking part in debate and discussion, in order to influence the decision making of panchayat body has been crucial in determining the nature of participation of Sarpanches in the functioning of Panchayat.

Table-I.12

Do you receive any training under PRI capacity building programme?

Do you receive any training under PRI capacity building programme			
Designation	Yes	No	Total
Sarpanch	62	58	120
	51.7%	48.3%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

Table -1.12 shows that 51.7 percent women Sarpanches responded that they have received training under the PRIs capacity building programme. On the other hand, 48.3 percent women Sarpanches replied that they have not received any training under the PRIs capacity building programmes. The analysis of the table no 1.12 shows that 48.3 percent women

Sarpanches needs training regarding the functioning of PRIs under the capacity building programme. These type of trainings will be very fruitful for women Sarpanches.

### Conclusion

All the respondents are satisfied with their present position. We can proudly say that women political empowerment through the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act has busted many myths like, women are not interested in the politics and are not taking part in any activities related to the Panchayats. Now, women

attends regular meetings of PRIs, through these meeting they come to know about the developmental programmes which are beneficial for the development of their areas. Therefore, we can say that government and civil society should motivate women to contest the elections. Awareness should be generated through social, print and electronic media. For better results and active participation of women in decision making process, government should provide time to time especially after the elections.

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