

# **Empowerment of Women Representatives in Gram Panchayats – A Case Study of Pakasma Village of Rohtak District in Haryana, India**

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## **Abstract**

*The present study “Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions” conducted on the sample of 50 women respondents from Pakasma village in Rohtak district, Haryana, India. Stratified sampling technique was adopted for selecting the sample from different wards of the village. Interview Schedule was used to collect primary data from the respondents. Analysis revealed that the awareness and constitutional knowledge of women was not satisfactory. Participation level of women in Gram Panchayats only limited, only to remain as voter. Some of the women respondents even do not know the functioning of Gram Panchayat. In Gram Panchayat election their husband and family decided that to whom that have to give vote, women do not have their own choice.*

*Women constitute more or less than half of the population of any country. But their involvement in politics is insignificant compared to men. Many psychological, social and physical factors hold women back from active political involvement. This is true as far as the state and national level politics is concerned. A democratic country cannot progress if energies of its half population are concerned in the kitchen only. After attaining independence Indian constitution ensured gender equality through various provisions and regulations. It was presumed that these rights would automatically get translated into political development of the women in the country. The issue of women’s participation in politics cannot be viewed in isolation from the general position of women in a society but despite their vast strength, women occupy a marginalized position in the political system.*

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## **I. Introduction**

Since independence, various initiatives have been undertaken for improving the socio-economic conditions and empowering women in India. In this context, the constitution guarantees socio-economic and political equality and the provision of equal rights for availing different opportunities to all social groups of population, especially women. Increasing emphasis has also been placed on initiating variety of development schemes and welfare programmes for maximizing the participation of women in different activities. Various legal reforms and resolutions in the form of social Acts have also been introduced to improve the social status and empowerment of women in the Indian social system.<sup>1</sup> However, little progress has been visualized in the participation of women in different activities.

Recognizing the unsatisfactory progress, that has been achieved in improving the socio-economic status of women, it has increasingly been felt desirable that involving rural women in any political system and ensuring their participation in the activities of such institutions, including in matters related to certain decision-making process, would be instrumental in improving the socio-economic status and political empowerment of women.<sup>2</sup> In view of these assumptions, the introduction of reservation policy is in favour of women in the Panchayat Raj Institutions. This has been an important Government intervention for maximizing the participation of women in different activities at village Panchayat levels.

This study relates to Panchayat Raj Institutions with particular reference to the ‘Empowerment of elected women representatives of Gram Panchayat’ in rural local self-government. This study is focused on the basic tier i.e., Gram Panchayat. This is done with a view to explain the basic units of Local Government in Haryana. Here there is scope for people’s participation and particularly for women’s representation. It is very difficult to study in detail the whole system of Panchayat Raj, as the subject covers vast area. In this study an attempt is made to analyse the empowerment of women representatives in Gram Panchayat – A case study of Pakasma village, located in Sampla block of Rohtak district.

## **The Problem**

India is known as the land of villages and even now majority of her population live in the villages. In India, women have been deprived of various kinds of opportunities and advantages by our traditional society for the past several centuries. Discrimination against women is commonly observed in providing opportunities of

socio-economic development, participation in different activities and development programmes and availing the opportunities of various facilities, which are directly or indirectly linked with bringing improvements in the life style and the quality of life, because of prevailing several social and cultural backwardness.<sup>3</sup> Besides this, women are also denied the rights in the decision making process of their family affairs on account of several social and cultural constraints imposed by their family and the continuation of traditional system of the society. Restrictions are also imposed on participation of women in certain social and cultural programmes and even in moving outside the households for certain purposes. Due to these underlined problems imposed by our traditional form of society against women their participation in different economic activities like education, employment, political system etc. has remained very poor even after six decades of independence. The socio-economic conditions of women in rural areas have been found to be even more serious and unsatisfactory in urban areas on account of the social and cultural backwardness of the society.<sup>4</sup> The traditional form of society has a distinct male bias while women are generally marginalized. In fact, the women are seriously exploited by men for certain purposes although most household related activities are only performed by women in rural areas.

Similarly, disadvantages in employment and other activities linked with the betterment of life are commonly observed in the case of women on account of the socio-cultural constraints imposed by their family.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, restrictions imposed on women in utilizing their rights independently and restrictions on their movements are further imposing limitations in availing the opportunities of gainful employment of women. The discrimination against women in employment which is largely practiced as a result of social values tends to place women in a secondary position and under the subjugation of men.

Recognizing the unsatisfactory progress that has been achieved in improving the socio-economic status of women in the past it has increasingly been felt desirable that involving rural women in the political system and ensuring their participation in the activities of its institutions, including in matters related to decision making process would be instrumental in improving the socio-economic status and political empowerment of women. In view of these assumptions, the introduction of reservation policy in favour of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions has therefore, been an important government intervention for maximizing the participation of women in different activities at Gram Panchayat levels and thereby to improve their socio- economic status.<sup>6</sup>

Gender inequality which the society has inherited as an age-old malpractice is not likely to vanish only by enacting a law or issuing a whip.<sup>7</sup> Sexual inequality has much deeper roots traditionally, socio-economically, educationally and psychologically which make it as a man-made complex problem that needs effective measures for its early redressal.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it is imperative to study all aspects of the social problems being faced by the women while discharging their responsibilities as a participant (representative) or a chairperson in newly constituted Gram Panchayat. With new scenario of providing recent administrative and financial backup and co-ordination, women's present mode of working as shown by their initiative, administrative acumen, leadership strengths and weaknesses, decision making and ability etc. need to be investigated in detail so as to make recommendations to ameliorate the existing impasse and to facilitate empowerment of women as a whole.

In this light, the present study has attempted to examine various issues related to the implementation pattern of reservation policy and its awareness among women, the nature of participation of women members in different meetings, activities and various development programmes of Gram Panchayats, social reform and welfare activities.

### **Main Objectives of the study:**

It is with a view to making an in-depth study of the Empowerment of Women Representatives in Gram Panchayats, that this study was undertaken. Among other objectives, the specific objectives of the study are as under:

1. To understand and report the socio-economic, educational background of the elected women representatives to Gram Panchayats of the area under study.
2. To study and assess the level of awareness of the elected women members about their roles and responsibilities and various development programmes.
3. To study the involvement of elected women members in decision making.
4. To study the problems and difficulties faced by the elected women representatives of Gram Panchayats.
5. To suggest suitable measures for the empowerment of women in Gram Panchayats.

### **Importance of the Study**

Since independence, various initiatives have been undertaken for improving the socio-economic conditions and empowering women in India. In this context, the Constitution guarantees socio-economic, cultural and political equality and the provision of providing equal rights for availing different opportunities to all social groups of population, especially women. Increasing emphasis has also been provided for initiating variety of development schemes and welfare programmes with maximizing the participation of women in different activities during the past plans.

After independence, various initiatives have been undertaken for bringing improvements in the socio-economic status and empowerment of women. Provisions were made in the Indian Constitution to provide equal rights and opportunities of socio-economic development and betterment of living for men and women; including different disadvantaged segment of population so as to establish an egalitarian and prosperous society.<sup>15</sup>

The Constitution also guarantees freedom to speech, personal liberty to participate in every kind of welfare, social economic and political activities to all Indian Citizens. The Constitution in its article 14 ensures equality before law and article 15 prohibits any discriminatory practices. Article 15(3) empowers states for making special provisions for favour of women and children, Article 16 (1) guarantees equalities in matters relating to employment and appointment to any public office for all the citizens and Article 16 (2) forbids discrimination practices on account of religion, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them in providing employment under any Government or public department is concerned.<sup>16</sup>

In view of bringing improvements in the socio-economic condition of women, provisions have also been made to maximize the participation of women in different levels of education. With this notion that education is the most important instrument to bring awareness about their rights, duties, social standing and as a prime element to maximize their participation in different categories of remunerative employment etc.<sup>17</sup>

The Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in the Constitution has a special bearing on the status and empowerment of women. The Constitution guarantees political equality to women through the provision of adult franchise. This reorganization was certainly a radical departure from socio-cultural norms of traditional Indian society. In addition to this, the state policy in its Article 38 also directs to states to ensure justice, socio-economic and political order and to speed up and guarantee the welfare of the people. Similarly Article 39 directly focuses on ensuring equality among men and women in providing opportunities of employment and livelihood, equal pay for similar category of work and protection of every segment of work force.<sup>18</sup>

In all, our Constitution has provided increasing initiatives for minimizing the discriminatory practices which were deeply developed before independence against women and other socially disadvantaged communities. In this manner these were the initial initiatives as brought out in the form of constitutional measures approaching towards radical departure from the persisting socio- cultural backwardness and social evils disfavouring women's interests for past several centuries of foreign rule in India. Further, in view of providing a concrete and actual shape to the initiatives and measures underlined in the constitutional provisions for social and economic upliftment of women the economic development planning introduced in 1951 had also initiated several schemes and programmes for the development and improving the socio-economic status of women. The outcome of the constitutional and legal measures and the initiatives undertaken under the various plans in the past for bringing improvements in the socio-economic status of women and thus achieving overall equality among men and women have certainly provided an opportunity to women to associate themselves and maximize their participation in Panchayats.

Thus it revealed that in spite of the introduction of various development programmes and different categories of legal reforms and social Acts, there has been a little progress in improving the participation of women in different social, economic, cultural and political activities due to the existence of several social and cultural foundations restricting them for availing certain facilities, which can directly or indirectly improve their socio-economic status. The biased attitude of society which is openly disfavouring women for availing certain opportunities had also deeply distorted their social status in rural areas.

However, it has to be kept in consideration that for achieving goal of bringing improvements in the socio-economic status and strengthening empowerment of women through introducing reservation policy, in each of the three tiers of Panchayats for women would mainly depend upon its pattern of implementation process and the extent of flexibilities maintained in its implementation.

The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act endowing PRIs with constitutional status constitutes a significant landmark in the evolution of grass roots democratic institutions in India. The ground for panchayati raj must be prepared by giving special training and facilities to the local poor. The larger society is now left with no alibi to shirk its own range and level of responsibilities. A massive programme of political education of the rural people and the rural political elite must be maintained for this. The new panchayati raj Act is a revolutionary concept to build democracy at the grass roots level.

## **II. Methodology of Empirical Data**

For the present study, both primary and secondary data was used. Primary data which was the base of our study was collected by interview schedule. In order to select the respondents from the different wards of the village Stratified Random Sampling method was used. The data was collected by the investigator from field. Simple statistical tools were used in the while tabulation and analyse of the data. Secondary data was collected from various government records and other sources.

An interview schedule was framed to collect the primary data. Village Pakasma was divided in 14 wards. As our study was on micro level, so out of 14 wards, 50 respondents were analysed, 25 respondents from each

ward. Here, random sampling method has been adopted for the selection of sample respondents. To understand the socio-economic background of respondents we would analysis the age, education, caste, family type, family size, family income, of the respondents.

**Table 1: Age-Wise Classification of Respondents**

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Young Age (18-31)	33	66%
Middle Age (32-50)	14	28%
Aged ( Above 50)	03	06%
Total	50	100%

The table 1 presents the age wise classification of the respondents. A perusal of the table reveals that out of total sample of 50 female respondents (66 per cent) belonged to 18- 31 years of age group, 28 per cent belonged to 32- 50 years of age group. Only 06 per cent respondents were from the age group of above 50 years.

**Table 2: Distribution of the Respondents on the basis of their Caste**

<b>Caste</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Upper caste	29	58%
Scheduled caste	13	26%
Other Backward caste	08	16%
Total	50	100

Table 2, shows that out of the total sample of 50 respondent's majority of women 29 per cent were from upper caste, followed by Scheduled caste 26 per cent and other backward caste 06 per cent. So caste system does not affect the participation.

**Table 3: Educational Qualification of the Respondents**

<b>Educational Qualification</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Illiterate	03	06%
Matric	17	34%

Senior Secondary	14	28%
Graduate	13	26%
Post-Graduate	05	10%
Total	50	100%

The table 3 depicts that majority of our respondents 34 per cent were matric passed. 14 per cent were studied up to senior secondary level. Followed by graduate level 13 per cent and 10 per cent respondents were Post-graduate and only 06 per cent women were illiterate. Education level was very low in this area. Education is essential to bring awareness in the respondents in context to PRI's.

**Table 4: Sources of Income of the Respondent's Family**

Occupation	Number	Percentage (%)
Agriculture	24	48%
Govt. Job	07	14%
Private Job	06	12%
Other	13	26%
Total	50	100%

Table 4 show that majority 48 per cent of women respondent's family were engaged in agriculture for livelihood, followed by 14 per cent respondent's family in Govt. job and after that 12 per cent and 26 per cent respondent's family were engaged in private job and other works respectively.

**Table 5: Awareness level of the Respondents about the Panchayati Raj**

Age Group	Number	Percentage (%)
Young Age (18-31)	33	66%
Middle Age (32-50)	14	28%
Aged ( Above 50)	03	06%
Total	50	100%

Table 5 shows that respondents have very less awareness about the Panchayati Raj Institution. They have very little knowledge about the Panchayati Raj Act 73rdAmendment, power and works of the Gram Panchayats, sources of income of Gram Panchayats and reservation of seats PRI's, assemblies and parliament. So we found less awareness of the respondents about various issues of PRI's and constitutional bodies.

### **III. Findings from the Empirical Data**

- i. When we analyse all the data collected from the respondents, we found that majority of respondents participate in the electoral process as voter.
- ii. From this study we found that respondents have very less awareness about the Panchayati Raj Act 73rd Amendment. They know that every village have a Panchayat which works for the development for the village but they do not know the various power, works etc. of the Panchayats.
- iii. They have a very little knowledge about the reservation of seats for women in Gram Panchayats. iv. During this survey we found that most of our respondents cast their vote to that candidate whom their husband chooses. Even they do not have that right to cast their vote for their own choice.

### **IV. Conclusion**

The present study entitled “Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions” is a study conducted to know the awareness and constitutional knowledge of women in PRI’s. The study has been conducted on 50 women respondents in Pakasma village in Rohtak district of Haryana. The study shows that participation of women in the affairs of Panchayat Elections is not up to mark. They have less awareness about the Panchayati Raj Act 73rd Amendment and the working of gram Panchayats. Even Our respondents have very less knowledge about the reservation of seats for women in Panchayats, Assemblies and Parliament. Our respondents also don’t know about the various sources of the gram Panchayats. So, in the light of the above analysis, it is quite obvious that a number of reasons like illiteracy, poverty, traditional family values and pattern of society, male dominance society etc. are responsible for their less participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

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