

A Study on Women Empowerment and Associated Factors of Women Empowerment under Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Uttarakhand”

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ABSTRACT

The 73rd Amendment in the Constitution may be regarded as a turning point in the history of the state initiatives with regard to political empowerment of rural women. It had indicated a noticeable shift in the approach of the Indian state towards women. The new state faces many formidable challenges. Women across the world have experienced social, economic and political transformation in recent years. Our constitution also has given women equal rights with men for improving their social status. These women represent diverse background-rich and poor, oppressed and backward, educated/literate and illiterate, young and old, working women and home makers etc. As most of them have not been able to perform their roles and responsibilities on account of lack of literacy and awareness and some of these acted as proxies of their husbands and in-laws. Very limited studies focused on Women Empowerment and Associated Factors of Women Empowerment under Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in holistic perspective. So, realizing the importance of women empowerment at the grass root level under PRIs in Uttarakhand state. The present study was conducted in Dehradun districts of Uttarakhand State on 80 women leaders especially Gram Pradhans who were selected by using chit method of simple random sampling. Data were collected with the help of semi structured interview schedule. The study aims at finding the socio-economic status of the women Gram Pradhans under PRIs. The major findings of the study indicated that women Gram Pradhans at the grass root level was dominated by educated, middle aged and of reserved categories women with medium economic status. The findings of the study also revealed that women Gram Pradhan had a medium level of empowerment.

Key words: Women Empowerment, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), 73rd Constitutional Amendment

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I. INTRODUCTION

The status of women in India has been subjected to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. The 73rd Amendment in the Constitution may be regarded as a turning point in the history of the state initiatives with regard to political empowerment of rural women. It had indicated a noticeable shift in the approach of the Indian state towards women.

Earlier women were generally viewed as objects of development only. This Amendment made women the subject of development, an indispensable part of the decision making process. Women, especially in rural areas are unaware of their rights and privileges and continue to be in a lower position than men. They are socially deprived and are uninformed about their rights and privileges, and are deprived of their legal rights to obtain property, education, and social status, and are never treated as equal participants in any developmental work. Gender inequality persists in all the three spheres (economic, social and political) of life, but inequality especially in the political sphere, has been identified as a major obstacle to the development of a nation.

As the half of the population are women, the country development can't be achieved without the proper participation of women (Jain, 1994). Keeping in view the New Constitutional (73rd) Amendment Act of 1993, the state Government of Uttarakhand has declared 50% reservation for women in institutions of local self-governance in 2007.

The latest Panchayati Raj elections in Uttarakhand state were held on this basis and as a result more than 50% women have come into Panchayat bodies. As reservation opened new avenues for rural women to empower themselves, hopefully political power would enable numerous women to improve their socio-economic

conditions, participatory abilities and thereby tap leadership abilities. The participation of women in politics can change the modalities and outcomes of politics. Political empowerment at the grass-roots level leads to increased social participation, which is the hallmark of a democratic system.

Empowerment is the only answer to the problems faced by women, and starting it from a very grass-roots level is a good initiative towards this. Local bodies, due to their nearness to the people and wider representative character, are capable of acting as an effective instrument of social change and development. So, PRIs can play a vital role in this context. It gives women a constitutional platform to stand up to their men, raise their voices against women's oppression, subjugation, and related issues, and thus gives them a sense of belonging in a traditional socio-political structure.

However, the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 is an effort made by our government to ameliorate the status of women. One-third of the seats in the PRI have been reserved for women, with the view of empowering women not only in the political sphere but also in the social and economic sphere. Keeping in view the above facts the present study was undertaken to investigate the relevance of socio-economic factors in promoting the emergence of women Gram Pradhans.

Objectives

The implementation of the provisions of the Uttarakhand Panchayati Raj Amendment Act 2008 has completed a decade in Uttarakhand. Thus, the study aims at accomplishing the following objectives:

- To investigate the socio-economic characteristics of women Gram Pradhans of Panchayati raj institutions.
- To assess the level of empowerment of women Gram Pradhans through Panchayati raj institutions.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in the Dehradun district of Uttarakhand state. Four blocks from the district were selected by using chit method of simple random sampling. Thus, Doiwala, Raipur, Sahaspur and Vikasnagar were selected from Dehradun district. The list of all the Gram Panchayats from the selected blocks were procured for the present investigation. The total respondents were 170 women Gram Panchayats at the grass root level. Gram Panchayats headed by women Gram Pradhans were selected purposively. From each block, investigator tried to contact all the women Gram Pradhans however due to some reasons the total number of women Gram Pradhans contacted from the selected blocks were 80. Data were collected with the help of pre-tested semi-structured interview schedule and checklist. Observation, focused group discussion method were also used to support the quantitative data.

Table 1: Statistics of Gram Panchayats of the four selected blocks:

S. No. Particulars		Block Statistics (Dehradun District)			
		Vikasnagar	Sahaspur	Doiwala	Raipur
1.	Gram Panchayats	51	50	34	35
2.	Women Gram Pradhans selected	25	21	16	18

VidyaTyade scale (2006) was used for assessing the empowerment (social, political and economic) level of women Gram Pradhans. Data were collected with the help of pre-tested semi-structured interview schedule. Analysis of the data was done with the help of different statistical tools like frequency distribution, percentage, mean and standard deviation.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

- Age

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to their age.

S. No.	Categories (years)	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Young (21-29 years)	14	17.5
2.	Middle (29-46 years)	49	61.25
3.	Old (>46)	17	21.25

Table 2: reveals that majority (61.25%) of the respondents belonged to the middle age group. The reason could be that this age group are more involved in social, political and economic aspects of life. They are more enthusiastic and efficient than the older ones and more responsible than the younger ones.

- **Education**

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to their education.

S. No.	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Illiterate	0	0
2.	Primary (1 st to 5 th)	0	0
3.	Middle (6 th to 9 th)	15	18.75
4.	High School/ Intermediate (10 th /12 th)	32	40
5.	Graduate and above	33	41.25

Table 3: stated that maximum 41.25 percent of the respondents were graduated. There was not a single respondent who was illiterate. Education has increased the active participation of women Gram Pradhans in Panchayats and has also helped them in overcoming narrow and conservative ideas about social customs and traditions.

- **Caste**

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to their Caste.

S.No.	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1.	General	35	43.75
2.	OBC	26	32.5
3.	ST	7	8.75
4.	SC	12	15

The above **Table 4:** presents that more than one third i.e., 35 percent of the respondents belonged to the general caste followed by OBC at 32.5 percent and SC at 15 percent. Only 8.75 percent of the respondents belonged to the ST category. The total proportion of women Gram Pradhans in reserved categories, 56.25 percent, is higher than women Gram Pradhans in the general category.

Land Holding

Table 5: Distribution of respondents according to their land holdings.

S. No.	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Agriculture	33	41.25
2.	Unskilled	5	6.25
3.	Skilled worker	10	12.5
4.	Business	19	23.75
5.	Service	13	16.25
	<i>Total</i>	80	100

Table 5 illustrates that a majority (63.75%) of the respondents possessed the land less than one hectare thus belonging to the marginal category.

• **Occupation**

Table 6: Distribution of respondents according to their occupation.

S. No.	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Landless	0	0
2.	Marginal (<1 hectare)	51	63.75
3.	Small (1-2 hectare)	17	21.25
4.	Medium (2-4 hectare)	9	11.25
5.	Large (>4 hectare)	3	3.75

The present study reveals that all the women Gram Pradhans were housewives and were dependent on their husband's occupation to support the family. The data in **Table 6** shows that the majority (41.25%) of the respondent's husbands belonged to an agricultural background.

• **Annual Income**

Table 7: Distribution of respondents according to their Annual Income.

S. No.	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage
1.	Low (less than 31,035)	0	0
2.	Medium (Rs. 31,035 to 2,62,464)	65	81.25
3.	High (above 2,62,464)	15	18.75

The data in **Table 7** reveals that majority of the respondents, 81.25 percent were found in the medium-income category group. Thus, showing majority of the respondents come from middle-class backgrounds.

• **Level of Empowerment of Women Gram Pradhans**

1. **Social Empowerment**

Table 8: Distribution of respondents according to their Social Empowerment.

S. No.	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage
1.	Low (less than 16.89)	7	18.75
2.	Medium (16.89 to 19.75)	60	75
3.	High (19.75 and above)	12	15

The data in **Table 8** reveals that most of the respondents (75%) had a medium level of social empowerment followed by a low level (18.75%) and a high level (15%) of social empowerment. The results reveals that PRIs have socially empowered women Gram Pradhans to a great extent. They are able to overcome all the social barriers after entering the local governance.

2. **Economic Empowerment**

Table 9: Distribution of respondents according to their Economic Empowerment.

S. No.	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low (less than 6.37)	14	17.5
2.	Medium (6.37 to 12.09)	58	72.5
3.	High (12.09 and above)	8	10

The data in **Table 9** reveals that majority (72.5%) of the respondents had a medium level of economic empowerment. They were more involved in the economic activities after entering the PRIs.

3. Political Empowerment

Table 10: Distribution of Respondents according to their political empowerment.

S. No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low (<2.49)	18	22.5
2.	Medium (2.49 – 6.35)	51	63.75
3.	High (>6.35)	11	13.75

The present data reveal that majority of the respondents had a medium (63.75%) level of political empowerment. The reservation has played a significant role in increasing the number of women in Panchayati raj institutions. However, the interference of the husband in Panchayat works strongly prevails. Women still have less say in making any political decisions.

Thus, the analysis of the findings revealed that more number of the women's under PRIs belonged to medium level of empowerment, when they got the opportunity to enter in this dome. The reason of this finding can be enumerated as the respondents having medium level of socio economic status were more eager to participate and carrying out the Panchayat task. Though, the findings regarding socioeconomic status indicated that majority of the respondent's belonged to agricultural background, having large family size, belonged to general caste, had primary level of education, pucca houses and possessed marginal and land holding. Maximum number of women were not holding any position in social organization other than PRIs. The cumulative results of SES of the study area depicted that majority of the respondents had medium level of socio economic status

IV. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that present study highlighted the socio-economic characteristics of the women Gram Pradhans in PRIs. It can be concluded that majority (61.25%) of the women Gram Pradhans belonged to the middle age (29-46) group, had a marginal land holding (63.75%) and belonged to the medium-income (Rs. 31,035 to 2,62,464) category (81.25%). The study also revealed that 41.25 percent of the respondents were graduated, 43.75 percent belonged to the General category, 41.25 percent were from the agricultural background. The concept of empowerment is dependent on social, economic and political factors. The present study reveals that women Gram Pradhans have a medium level of empowerment in all the three dimensions (social, economic and political). Majority 75 percent of women Gram Pradhan were socially empowered followed by 72.5 percent were economically empowered and 63.75 percent of women Gram Pradhan were politically empowered. This can enable the policy makers and planners what type of women pre-dominantly takes the leadership roles. On the basis of the major findings of the study, it was concluded that emergence of women leadership at the grass root level was dominated by educated, middle aged and of reserved categories women with medium economic status. As majority of Gram Pradhans are first time elected and all of them are housewives. Thus, efforts should be made to train them or enhancing their leadership competency.

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