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Panchayati Raj Institutions and Women Empowerment: A Case Study of Gram Panchayats of Malwa Region of Punjab

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Abstract

*The women constitute half of the society. The feudal attitudes of looking down upon the abilities of women and not promoting them, is still continuing in different degrees at various levels of our society. While women have made many advances, their inferior status to men continues to be a global phenomenon. At a time of unprecedented economic growth, India is experiencing a dramatic intensification of violence against women and the majority of girls are still not getting equal educational opportunity. In one of the most important steps for the empowerment of women, the Indian government gave constitutional status to village-level councils or Panchayati Raj institutions and reserved 33% of the seats in Panchayats for women. Punjab government, like many other states of India, has given 50% reservations in Panchayati Raj Institutions in 2018. As a result, during the elections held in December 2018, 50% women elected in local bodies in Punjab. The present study addresses the question that weather women are actually empowered through this reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions? For this purpose Gram Panchayat Women Elected Representatives especially Sarpanchs (Head of Panchayat) of Sangrur district (Malwa region) in Punjab have been chosen. The district Sangrur is chosen because it is one of the largest districts of Punjab. There is total 600 Gram Panchayats in the district, divided into 10 blocks, out of which Sarpanchs of 300 Panchayats are women. For the completion of this study a **convenient** sample of 100 Women Elected Representatives (Sarpanchs), 10 from each block, have chosen. Data has collected through primary as well as secondary sources. The views of all the Sarpanchs have taken with the help of*

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structured interviewed Schedule. This paper concludes with some suggestions for actual empowerment of women in PRIs.

Introduction:

J.S. Millonce observes that "The only government, which can satisfy all exigencies of social state is one in which the whole people participate". The women constitute half of the society. However, in India women have been deprived of various kinds of opportunities and advantages by our traditional society for the past several centuries. The woman was marginalized from the public sphere and most of the decisions are taken by the male dominated power structure in the society. The feudal attitudes of looking down upon the abilities of women and not promoting them, is still continuing in different degrees at various levels of our society. While women have made many advances, their inferior status to men continues to be a global phenomenon. At a time of unprecedented economic growth, India is experiencing a dramatic intensification of violence against women and the majority of girls are still not getting equal educational opportunity. Various initiatives are taken to improve the status of women in independent India. Of great importance in this respect was the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, 1992. This was a historic event towards revitalization of Panchayati Raj Institutions in general and empowerment of SCs, STs and women in particular. The instrument is aimed at empowering these groups who were getting marginalized and subjected to various types of oppressions. This development, besides making panchayats truly self-governing units and representative of people, offers these groups an opportunity to participate actively in their decision making process. Punjab government, like many other states of India, has also given 50% reservations to women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in 2018. As a result, during the elections held in December 2018, 50% women were elected in local bodies in Punjab.

The term empowerment is a broad concept and it depends on the situations in which it has been used. It can be said that empowerment is the ability or capacity attained by a person to determine his/her destiny. Empowerment refers to measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self-determination in people and in communities in order to enable them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way, acting on their own authority. Empowerment as action refers both to the process of self-empowerment and to professional support of people, which enables them to overcome their sense of powerlessness and lack of

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Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

influence, and to recognize and use their resources. In a broader sense, empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. So empowerment has multiple, interrelated and interdependent dimensions such as economic, social, cultural, psychological and political dimensions (Sowdeeswari, 2014).

Significance of the Study:

The Present study is very significant because 50 percent women representatives were elected in panchayats in Punjab for the first time. Thus, question arises here is that, weather women are actually empowered through this reservation or not? This study is an attempt to find out the answer of this question.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of this study are:-

1. To find out that weather the women are actually empowered through reservation process in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Punjab?
2. To study the knowledge, intensity of participation and performance of elected women leaders/representatives in PRIs.
3. To study the various problems faced by women representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions and make suggestions to solve these problems.

Scope of the Study:

The present study is limited to the Gram Panchayats of Sangrur district of Malwa region of Punjab. The district Sangrur is chosen because it is one of the largest districts of Punjab and most of its population lives in rural areas.

Research Methodology:

For this study, both primary as well as secondary sources have been taped. There is total 600 Gram Panchayats in the district, divided into 10 blocks, out of which Sarpanchs (Head of Panchayat) of 300 Panchayats are women. For the purpose of collecting primary data, a convenient sample of 100 Women Elected Representatives (Sarpanchs), 10 from each block (10X10=100), have been chosen. To get their views, an interview schedule was used with some multi-choice questions and some open ended questions. Secondary sources included journals, websites and online research papers.

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ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

RESPONSES OF WOMEN ELECTED REPRSENTATIVES (Sarpanchs):

Table – 1.1

Have you contest or won any election before becoming a Sarpanch?

(Women Elected Representatives)

(Frequency Distribution)

Responses	No. of WER	Percentage
Yes	14	14%
No	86	86%
Total	100	100%

The Women Elected Representatives were asked whether they have contest or won any election before this. The results show that only 14% Women Elected Representatives said yes and 86% said no, they never contest or won any election in past.

Table – 1.2

Why did you decide to contest the election of the Sarpanch?

(Women Elected Representatives)

(Frequency Distribution)

Responses	No. of WER	Percentage
Due to your own interest	21	21%
Because your father or husband told you to contest	12	12%
One of your male family members wanted to contest the election, but because of reservation you had to contest	46	46%
Because public said this	21	21%
Total	100	100%

The Women Elected Representatives were asked about the reason why they decide to contest the election. The results were displayed in the table 1.2. The result shows that only 21% Women Elected Representatives said they contest the election by their own interest. 12% said their father or husband told them to do so. 46% said that one of their male family members wanted to contest the election, but because of reservation they contest on the behalf of their

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Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

family member. 21% Women Elected Representatives said that they contest election because the residents of village told them to do so.

Table – 1.3
After you become a Sarpanch, have you been given any training by government on your powers and functions?
(Women Elected Representatives)

(Frequency Distribution)

Responses	No. of WER	Percentage
Yes	40	40%
No	60	60%
Total	100	100%

The Women Elected Representatives were asked have they got any training by the government after become a Sarpanch. The results show that only 40% said yes, they got and 60% said they don't.

Table – 1.4
Do you have knowledge about the financial powers of Sarpanch?
(Women Elected Representatives)

(Frequency Distribution)

Responses	No. of WER	Percentage
Yes	10	10%
No	90	90%
Total	100	100%

The Women Elected Representatives were asked about their knowledge of financial powers of Sarpuchs. The results show that only 10% said yes, they know the financial powers of sarpanch. 90% said they don't know.

Table – 1.5
How often you conduct the meeting of Gram Panchayat?
(Women Elected Representatives)

(Frequency Distribution)

Responses	No. of WER	Percentage
Every week	29	29%
After every 15 days	27	27%
After 1 month	35	35%
No meeting/quorum not complete	09	09%

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Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

Total	100	100%

The Women Elected Representatives were asked about how often they conduct the meeting of Gram Panchayat. The results were displayed in table no. 1.5. The result shows that 29% said they conduct meeting in every week, 27% said after 15 days, 35% said after one month. 9% said they didn't conduct any meeting yet, because the quorum is not complete.

Table – 1.6

Have a family member participate with you during the Gram Panchayat meeting?

(Women Elected Representatives)

(Frequency Distribution)

Responses	No. of WER	Percentage
Yes	84	84%
No	16	16%
Total	100	100%

The Women Elected Representatives were asked about the participation of their family members (Husband, father, Father-in-law) in the meetings of Gram Panchayats. The result shows that 84% Women Elected Representatives agreed that their family members participate in the meetings. 16% said no.

Table – 1.7

Do the residents of your village communicate directly with you about their problems and works?

(Women Elected Representatives)

(Frequency Distribution)

Responses	No. of WER	Percentage
Yes	21	21%
Only ladies come to me	28	28%
People come to me as well as to my family member	27	27%

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No, people don't come to me	24	24%
Total	100	100%

The Women Elected Representatives were asked that do the residents of their village communicate directly with them about their problems and works. The result shows that 21% said yes. 28% said only ladies of their villages come to them, 27% Women Elected Representatives said people come to them as well as to their family members. 24% said people don't come to them.

Table – 1.8

Is the full support given to you by other male members of panchayat when you address any meeting of Gram Panchayat?

(Women Elected Representatives)

(Frequency Distribution)

Responses	No. of WER	Percentage
Yes	90	90%
No	10	10%
Total	100	100%

The Women Elected Representatives were asked that is the full support is given to them by other male panchayat members. The result shows that 90% Women Elected Representatives said yes and 10% said no.

Table – 1.9

Do you have full support from your family to do panchayat work?

(Women Elected Representatives)

(Frequency Distribution)

Responses	No. of WER	Percentage
Yes	100	100%
No	0	0%
Total	100	100%

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Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

When Women Elected Representatives were asked that do they get support from their families to do the work of panchayat. The result shows that all the Women Elected Representatives said yes.

Table – 1.10

Do you think women have been actually empowered since they have been given 50% reservation in PRIs?

(Women Elected Representatives)

(Frequency Distribution)

Responses	No. of WER	Percentage
Yes	60	60%
No	40	40%
Total	100	100%

The Women Elected Representatives were asked about their views on women empowerment through this reservation. The result shows that 60% Women Elected Representatives said yes women are empowered by this and 40% said no, there is no change.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

1. Out of total 100 Women Elected Representatives, 60 belong to General category and 40 belong to SC category.
2. 21% Women Elected Representatives were illiterate, 18% were 5^{th} pass, 14% were 8^{th} pass, 26% were 10^{th} pass, 12% were 12^{th} pass and only 9% were graduate.
3. The Women Elected Representatives were asked whether they have contest or won any election before this. Only 14% said yes and 86% said no, they never contest or won any election in past.
4. The Women Elected Representatives were asked about the reason why they decide to contest the election. Only 21% Women Elected Representatives said they contest the election due to their own interest. 12% said their father or husband told them to do so. 46% said that one of their male family members wanted to contest the election, but because of reservation, they contest on the behalf of their family member. 21% Women Elected Representatives said that they contest election because the residents of village told them to do so.

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ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

5. The Women Elected Representatives were asked have they got any training by the government after become a Sarpanch. The results show that only 40% said yes, they got and 60% said they don't.
6. The Women Elected Representatives were asked about their knowledge of financial powers of Sarpachs. The results show that only 10% said yes, they know the financial powers of sarpanch. 90% said they don't know.
7. The Women Elected Representatives were asked about how often they conduct the meeting of Gram Panchayat. 29% said they conduct meeting of GP every week, 27% said after 15 days, 35% said after one month. 9% said they didn't conduct any meeting yet, because the quorum is not complete.
8. The Women Elected Representatives were asked about the participation of their family members (Husband, father, Father-in-law) in the meetings of Gram Panchayats. 84% Women Elected Representatives agreed that their family members participate in the meetings. Only 16% said no.
9. The Women Elected Representatives were asked that do the residents of their village communicate directly with them about their problems and works. 21% said yes. 28% said only ladies of their villages come to them, 27% Women Elected Representatives said people come to them as well as to their family members. 24% said people don't come to them.
10. The Women Elected Representatives were asked that is the full support is given to them by other male panchayat members. The result shows that 90% Women Elected Representatives said yes and 10% said no.
11. The Women Elected Representatives were asked about their views on women empowerment through this reservation. The result shows that 60% Women Elected Representatives said yes women become more powerful by this and 40% said no, there is no change.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. There is a need to increase Literacy level among women because when women become literate, then they become more powerful and confident about themselves.

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Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

2. There is a need to spread awareness among young educated girls about the importance of Politics in Nation's development. So we need to bring educated women or girls in politics for women empowerment and also for our country's development.
3. Need to fix a minimum qualification to contest elections for Panchayati Raj Institutions. Thus educated women come in these institutions.
4. Proper training should also be given to elected representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions especially to women about their role and powers in Panchayati Raj Iinstitutions.
5. There is need to stop entry of husbands/sons (male relative) of Women Elected Representatives in all meetings of Gram Panchayats, Panchayats Samities or Zila Parishads, to insure actual empowerment of women representatives in PRIs.
6. Printed material should also be distributed time to time among women representatives to aware them about their duties and rights/powers.
7. Some seminars should also be organized in Pancahyati Raj Institutions about women empowerment, so that women representatives become confident and do their work by themselves and don't depend on their husbands or other male family members.
8. Society should also need to change its opinion about women leadership.

CONCLUSION

At the end it can be said that with the establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions in our country a woman gets an opportunity to prove her worth as a good administrator, decision-maker or a good leader. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 is a milestone in this regard. It provides women a chance to come forward. It is up to them to make use of this opportunity. This experiment is proving to be a big success particularly by providing opportunity to women to come out of their houses and participate in administrative and political field. PRIs become a good platform for women empowerment. However, women are still not empowered. They are elected and working equal to men but there are so many challenges/problems for women in PRIs, which needs to solve, by themselves and by government and also by our society. After that we can said that women are empowered.

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ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

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