

Effectiveness of Women Sarpanch in Rural Development: A study of Bathinda District

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Abstract—The vision of rural development and women empowerment was the first and foremost priority of our visionary government since independence. Without the participation of women, in grass root level governance, the rural development was a distant dream. Realizing importance of women participation and their empowerment, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment has mandated the women representation in PRI. This was a revolutionary step. Initially there was some constraint and limitation of women to take part in local governance through PRI. Their reluctance to represent themselves, has led the establishment of dominance of their spouse or kin as a proxy. But awareness through education, social media platforms, television, mobile phones has played a strong role to educate and motivate women to work in the mainstream.

Though the development work in rural areas by women sarpanches are slow unlike the male sarpanches but there are few examples where the women Sarpanches are in commanding position and doing commendable work better than their male counter parts. Therefore, there is a need to provide rural women a proper platform, recognition, acknowledgement and empowerment so that more women should join hands in the rural development.

Index Terms—Panchatati Raj Institutions (PRI), Development, Empowerment, Rural, Sarpanch, Panch.

I. INTRODUCTION

The state of Punjab stands at the top in the list of agricultural states. Agriculture is the main source of income and employment for rural people. As such they never liked to move out in search of job or employment except in cases of going abroad by educated youth. This resulted into concentration of population in villages. Besides this conducive agricultural fields to include sufficient irrigation facilities, social factors and government policies for subsidized fertilizers and seeds to village farmers

helps strong population base encouraging people to remain in rural areas. In recent past 75% of Punjab's population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture. In spite of a prosperous state, some of its rural areas have also socio-economic problems like many other states. Illiteracy, poor & inadequate health care facilities, drug menace among youth, unequal distribution of land are common issues. In order to address these problem, effective rural development always remained top priority of our state as well central government.

Economic development of any country is possible only with development of its rural areas. James H Copp has defined it as a process through collective efforts, aimed at improving the well-being and self-realization of rural people. The core objectives of rural development are to widen public choice by providing a range of facilities. Many scholars have defined rural development in their own perspective. However, the rural development is to improve the quality of living standard to include health and hygiene, clean environment, food & nutrition, education & employment and variety of other social services. Industrialization, urbanization and globalization has brought a transformative change over the past few years. In order to ensure the participation of both gender in rural development, our government has passed 73rd constitutional amendment act in 1992 providing reservation to women in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI). These elected leaders of village panchayats are being emerging as a catalyst force of change, bringing innovative ideas and scheme for long standing rural problems and setting new paradigm in governance and development.

There are multifaceted challenges in rural areas. PRI are considered an effective institutional tool in which the ultimate sufferer of society identifies their issues

and collectively decides the best possible way to resolve it. This has empowered villagers to find ways and means to navigate from these challenges in an acceptable manner. Some of the Women Sarpanches has come out as a torch bearer in many villages of Malwa region and they have taken great initiative towards this. They have already shown remarkable resilience in resolving some of these multifaceted challenges of rural development. Their success stories have not only inspired other women but also highlights the potential of inclusive governance. As they continue to innovate new facilities and amenities to make the future of rural people more comfortable keeping in view the gender equality.

Historical context and the rise of women sarpanch.

Indian ancient history is full of the valour and grit of women in all walk of life. But in medieval India the status of women declined due to various socio-economic reasons. In order to empower the women and their role in all nation building/development the 73rd constitution amendment act was passed in 1992. The 73rd CAA has paved the way by providing 33% reservation to the women in all elected post in local bodies which has now been extended up to 50% by almost all states. This act has proved a mile stone in the political empowerment of women in rural areas.

The government of Punjab also established PRI under Punjab Panchayati Raj Act 1994 with elected bodies at village, block and district level. Reservation for women in local bodies has been increased from 33% to 50% by Punjab government in 2017. At the beginning, there were some instances where women sarpanches remained as proxies and the male members of their families used to participate in the PRI meetings and take decisions. Now the Punjab governments have banned male members of the women sarpanch to take part in the meeting of the PRI. This provision has also given a free hand to the women to participate in decision making process in PRIs and also help to eliminate the proxy system.

Overview of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Punjab

Though Panchayats were established in all states in the country after independence but the Balwant Rai Mehta Committees report in 1957 has advocated a three tier Panchayat Raj system in India. During the last four decades several steps have been taken by the central as well as the state governments of the country to strengthen Panchayati Raj. In view to strengthen the capacity and capabilities of women,

the union government of India has passed 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 giving 33% reservation to women in all position of local bodies. This act has empowered all marginalized section of villages including women. Now the rural people able to go to the BDO office and talk about their problems in confidence. PRI has also empowered women. Now women as a village leader organize the PRI meeting, participate in PRI meeting and discuss the real issues of the villagers and take decision to address these issues.

Evolution of Women Participation in local governance.

It is well known that women are actively involved in house hold and community work and are well aware of real issue faced by common people and have deep insight of livelihood development as proposed by Richa Sankar (2014). As per India Census 2011, total population of Punjab is 2,77,43,338 which comprises of 1,46,39,465 males and 1,31,03,873 females with sex ratio of 895 females per 1000 males. In rural areas the share of women is 47.5% of the total rural population in comparison to 52.4% of male. (Census 2011). 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act by giving participation rights to women in local governance, has taken a well-defined initiative to bridge inequalities between man and women. As a result of this, a total of 15 women Sarpanches got elected in village Panchayat of each block of Bathinda and Maur of District Bathinda, Punjab. Female leaders have played a special role to advocate of social justice, education, family planning, and health (Gosh and Pramanik 2007, 185). Suchita Dass (2014) has also found in her study of “Women participation in Panchayati Raj - A case study of Karimganj District of Assam” Encouraged with the early sign of women empowerment through PRI, the government of Punjab has increased the reservation of women in PRI from 33% to 50%.

Objective of the study

- 1.To study factors determinants for effective participation of the women in PRI.
- 2.To study developmental work carried out by women sarpanches.
- 3.To examine difficulties faced by women sarpanches in PRI.

Effectiveness of Women Sarpanches in Bathinda District, Punjab

This paper is trying to analyzing the developmental work carried out by the women sarpanches in their villages. To study the effectiveness of women in PRIs, this paper included the variables like Participation and decision making by women sarpanch in PRI meeting, developmental work done by women sarpanches and willingness of women to be Sarpanch if they get opportunities. This research paper deals with the effectiveness of women Sarpanches in rural development through Panchayati Raj Institutions. It also tries out the challenges faced and milestones to be covered by women sarpanches during their tenure. Besides, views of elected women Sarpanches regarding reservation, opinion of other male and female villagers is also discussed in this paper. For this purpose, researcher has collected the data from Muar and Bathinda blocks of district Bathinda Punjab.

III. METHADODOLOGY

The area of study is Bathinda district. Bathinda district has 9 blocks namely Bathinda Rural, Bathinda Urban, Nathana, Rampura, Phul, Talwandi Sabo, Maur, Bhagta Bhaika, Sangat. The present study was conducted in Maur and Bathinda Blocks which have been randomly selected. The demographic details of Maur and Bathinda Block are mentioned in Table below.

| Block Name | Location | | Population | | Literacy | |
|----------------------|----------|----------|------------|--------|----------|--------|
| | North | East | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Bathinda Rural Block | 29°30' N | 74° 75'E | 210510 | 186679 | 69% | 47% |
| Maur Block | 30°08' N | 75° 25'E | 55705 | 49564 | 85% | 79% |

IV. RESULTS

A total of 100 villagers (50 males and 50 female) have been selected on randomized sample method from both the blocks for this study. The data collected from the participant through face-to-face interview on the basis of a structured questionnaire pertaining about general awareness and specific to development work of village Panchyat. Responses received from male and female on questionnaire of general awareness has been tabulated in Table 1 & Table 2 and depicted in graphs 1 and 2 respectively and responses on specific to the developmental works

done or being done as collected from both male and female are tabulated in Table 4 and graph 3.

V. DISCUSSION

On thorough analysis of male and female responses, it is evident that besides political awareness among women, they are now becoming the role model to bring all round development of their villages. Women sarpanches as a policy maker choose policies more favorable for the well-being of children, health care, drinking water, skill development of women etc. Many women village sarpanches were able to bring innovative developmental plans such as rain water harvesting, mechanism for proper disposal of garbage/wastage, construction of proper drainage system, establishing skill development center etc. There is a need to recognize and acknowledge their work and encourage them to take active participation in decision making and its implementation.

All stakeholders of rural development should start embarking on the transformative journey of women led development and create an environment that truly nurture the potential of women leaders in PRI. This will allow women to have a voice in the community that they did not have before and will enable to shape current and future landscape of women led

development.

Table No. 2: Responses of Male Respondents on questions of general natures

| Questions from participants | Response of Participants | |
|--|--------------------------|---------------|
| | Yes | No/do'nt know |
| Do you know who is village Sarpanch | 49 | 01 |
| Is Your village Sarpanch participate in village Panchayat meeting | 41 | 09 |
| Is your village sarpanch visit to BDO office for developmental work of village | 32 | 18 |
| Is Your village Sarpanch takes decision in PRI meeting | 33 | 07 |
| Are you satisfied from work done by women sarpanch | 36 | 14 |
| Are women Sarpanch more effective in her post | 27 | 23 |
| Are our social system becoming the barrier for women sarpanch | 29 | 21 |
| Is reservation of women in PRI good. | 27 | 23 |

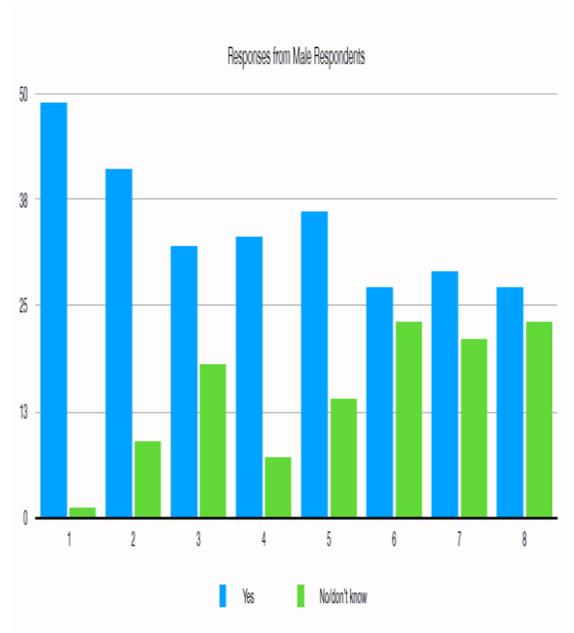
Table No.3: Responses of Female Respondents on questions of general natures

| Questions from participants | Response of Participants | |
|--|--------------------------|---------------|
| | Yes | No/do'nt know |
| Do you know who is village Sarpanch | 50 | - |
| Is Your village Sarpanch participate in village Panchayat meeting | 35 | 15 |
| Is your village sarpanch visit to BDO office for developmental work of village | 36 | 14 |
| Is Your village Sarpanch takes decision in PRI meeting | 30 | 20 |
| Are you satisfied from work done by women sarpanch | 37 | 13 |
| Are women Sarpanch more effective in her post | 38 | 12 |
| Are our social system becoming the barrier for women sarpanch | 19 | 31 |
| Is reservation of women in PRI good. | 47 | 03 |

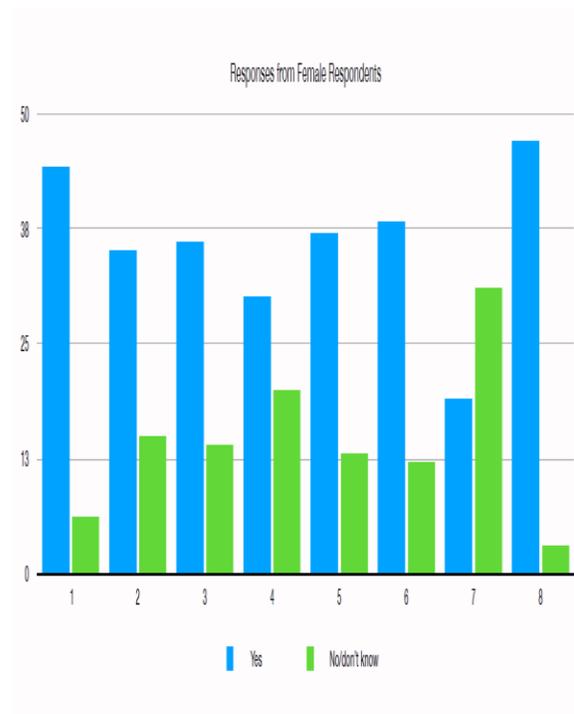
Table No 3: Responses of Male/Female Respondents pertaining to developmental Progress

| Questions from participants | Response of Participants | |
|---|--------------------------|---------------|
| | Yes | No/don't know |
| Construction of Packka village streets | 65 | 30 |
| Provision of drinking water for each house holder | 75 | 21 |
| Installation of solar lights on the streets | 30 | 65 |
| Disposal of garbage/wastage | 45 | 50 |
| Drainage Facilities | 65 | 30 |
| Establishment of community health center | 42 | 55 |
| Rain water harvesting facilities | 12 | 80 |
| Skill development Centre for women | 27 | 73 |
| Primary education facilities | 66 | 32 |
| Park/Playground for children | 42 | 50 |
| ATM facilities | 10 | 805 |

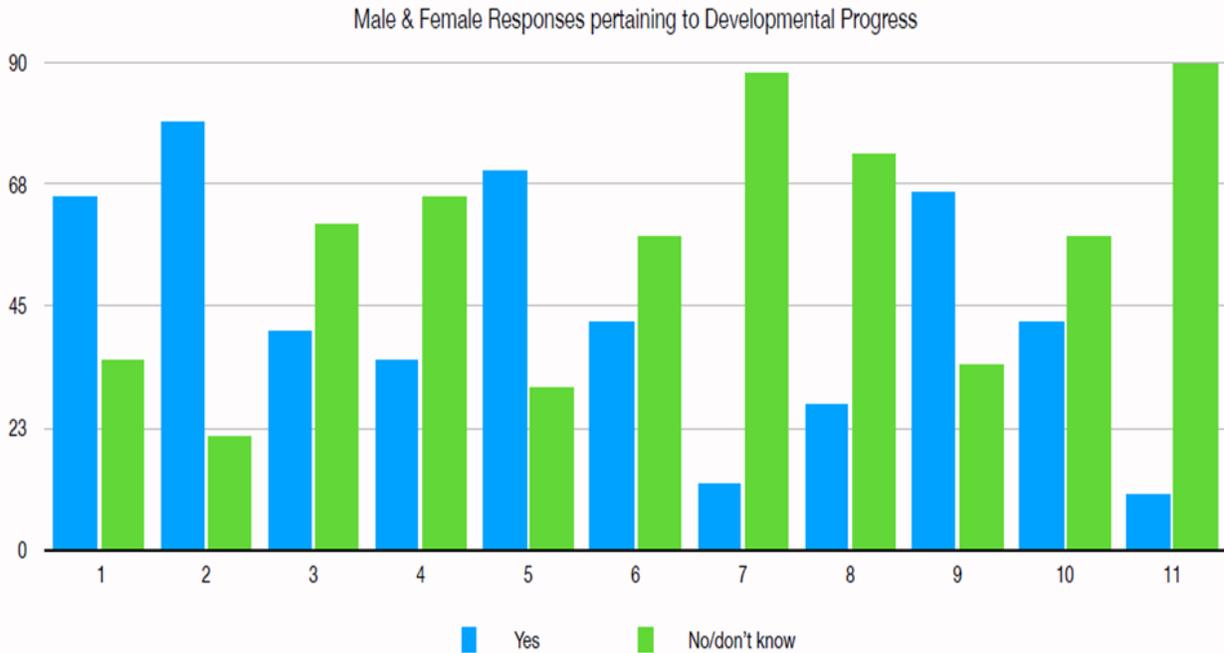
Graph 1: Responses of Male Respondents on questions of general natures



Graph 2: Responses of Female Respondents on questions of general natures



Graph 3: Responses of Male/Female Respondents pertaining to developmental Progress



proper drainage system, establishing skill development center etc. There is a need to recognize and acknowledge their work and encourage them to take active participation in decision making and its implementation. All stakeholders of rural development should start embarking on the transformative journey of women led development and create an environment that truly nurture the potential of women leaders in PRI. This will allow women to have a voice in the community that they did not have before and will enable to shape current and future landscape of women led development.

Early Challenges & Mile Stone to be Achieved.

There are numbers of factors responsible for low political participation of villages women. The main reasons are as under: -

- Psychological factors. Women are made to think that politics is a game of male members only. This is mainly due to patriarchal setup of the society in Punjab.
- Social and Cultural factors. The social fabric of Punjab prefers women to be confined in the four walls of their houses giving them the responsibility for taking care of children and

cattle. Even elected women members have to take permission from male members of the family before performing their duties as public representative.

- parties or from their male relatives. Lack of financial support is also one of the major hurdles in women participation in politics
- Family Responsibilities. Women remain busy in taking care of domestic responsibilities which makes them overburden from dust to down. They hardly get time to participate in political activities.
- Lack of resources. Now days huge amount of money is needed for contesting election. They do not receive any financial support from political
- Education. The education plays a crucial role in shaping the overall human being. The education of female plays important role in political participation. Lack of proper education is one of the main barriers for women in political arena. Due to less education women are not able to understand the government plan and policies and their impact.

- Proxy Candidates. Since there is a dominance of male members in all government and local bodies, this makes an atmosphere where the women representative feels shyness and keeps themselves almost silent and hardly play any active role. Most of the time proxies represent the women sarpanches and they act as rubber stamp of male members of the family.

V. CONCLUSION

- Rural development is advocated as a basic strategy for economic development. Since ancient times women remained in the center stage of rural development to include cattle rearing, agricultural work, stitching and weaving, earthen pot making and decorating. With passage of time the scope of rural development has increased multiple times to include muddy roads to concrete roads, electric lights to village streets, drainage system, Garbage disposal mechanism, drinking water with RO facilities, primary health care centers, rain water management, primary educational facilities, public parks and many more. Though role of women representatives and women village Sarpanches are not much encouraging but there are few examples where women Sarpanches have exceptionally done commendable job and for this they have been honored by state as well as central government. This has definitely shown a shining ray of hope for other women. Therefore, there is a need to provide village women a proper platform, recognition, acknowledgement and empowerment so that more women should join hand in the development work of villages. This will enable to drive our women led development further forward.

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