

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Are Women Empowered? Panchayati Raj Institutions in Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Anita Banerjee

Lecturer, Department of Economics, Mahatma Gandhi Government College, Mayabunder, India

Abstract:

As we approach 20 years of Panchayati Raj, In India particularly in these Islands it is time to take stock of to what extent women have participated in these institutions and are they empowered? A brief study was conducted with the object of finding out the extent of their empowerment in terms of EWR (elected women representatives) in panchayats in all the three tiers of panchayat in A&N islands, steps taken to empower women elected representatives and suggest measures Study is based on information through published sources. It has been found that their participation is largest at the intermediate level (40.57%) and least at the village level. In order to empower them more number of sensitization programs at frequent intervals are required

Keywords: Panchayat, Pradhan, Pramukh, PRI, women

1. Introduction

Panchayati Raj system has evolved as powerful institutions of local governance, particularly in states where state legislature does not operate. This is applicable to most of the union territories. As we celebrate twenty years of Panchayat Raj and the Island gears up for the next round of elections to be held in 2015, it is time to assess the participation of women in the three tier system of local governance (Panchayati Raj) in these Islands, in order that through this powerful, women (as well as through the participation of women in an effective manner) can assert themselves. The paper is divided into the following parts. The first part deals with the evolution of panchayats in India. Second section briefly outlines the position of women in politics; along with the previous studies on women in panchayats. Third section outlines the entry of women in Panchayati Raj institutions through the constitutional provisions. Fourth sections deal with women and Panchayati raj in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Fifth section highlights the steps taken to empower the elected women representatives. Last section points out the gaps and gives suggestions.

1.1. The Present Study

The present study seeks to examine the extent to which women have been empowered through Panchayati Raj system in Andaman and Nicobar

1.2. Objectives

- To assess the empowerment of women in terms of the number of elected women representatives in Panchayats in A&N islands.
- To analyze if the very presence in the Panchayat bodies is an indication of their empowerment or otherwise.
- What steps have been initiated to empower the women representatives?
- To identify the lacunae and suggest appropriate measure.

1.3. Methodology

The Study is based on Information collected from published sources. Also supplementary information has been collected through informal discussions with PRI members

2. Evolution of Panchayats

Panchayats are institutions of self –governance at the grass root level. However the very concept of panchayats in its variant form existed in the ancient times as well. The ‘Rigveda’ one of India’s oldest sacred book and historical source mentions about the existence of village communities. It throws light on how the village communities served as link between agrarian village and their higher authorities. Gradually these assemblies which were known as “sabhas” came to be called “panchayats” (which meant an assembly of five respected elders). During British period too there was a bit of attention given towards local governance .Lord Mayo in 1870 sought to pass a resolution for decentralization of power. But a significant step towards establishing village Panchayat system was witnessed by the Bengal Chowkidari Act 1870. After independence a series of steps were taken initially to

set up panchayats in our country, Article 40 of the constitution envisaged setting up of non mandatory Directive principles of State Policy. The legislative power to establish village Panchayat was given to the states as per item 5 of list II of seventh schedule of the constitution. This was followed by the community development project 1952. It was only under the pioneering suggestions made by shr i Balwant Rai Mehta who happened to be the head of the committee on study of community development projects and national extension services, which paved the way for establishing village Panchayat body. This shall be a mandatory body to oversee the developmental activities of the entire village.

Year	Major Events
1952	Community Development and Sahakari samaj
1957	Balwant Mehta Committee
1958-1959	State govt. enacting Panchayat Acts
1959	Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurating the first generation Panchayats in Rajasthan
1962	ZP Act of UP
1964-1977	Decline of first generation of Pr
1966-67	Ministry of community Development became a department under Ministry of food and Agriculture
1977	Ashok Mehta Committee
1978	Ashok Mehta Committee Report submitted
1978	West Bengal Panchayat elections on political party lines. This marked the beginning of second generation PR
1978	Zinabhai Darj Committee on social justice/Orient elections
1983	Karnataka Govt. following West Bengal Panchayat Act ushers in PR
1985	Andhra Pradesh follows suit
1980's	Idea of district govt. especially the writings of Nirmal Mukharji came to be recognized
1988	Parliamentary committee under P.K.Thungan made its recommendations
1989 May 15	63 rd Constitutional Amendment Bill introduced in Parliament
1989 Oct. 15	63 rd Constitutional Amendment Bill was defeated in rajya Sabha
1990 Sep. 7	64 th constitutional Amendment Bill introduced in Parliament
1990	Panchayats were brought under Administrators in Karnataka
1991 sep.,	72 nd (Panchayats) and 73 rd (Nagarpalika)Amendments introduced in Parliament
1992 Dec.22	Lok Sabha passed the Bill(as 73 rd and 74 th amendments) on Panchayats and Nagarpalikas
1992 Dec.23	Rajya Sabha passed the Bills
1993 April 24	The 73 rd Amendment Act was brought into force
May 30	The 74 th Amendment Act was brought into force
1994 May 30	M.P. was the first state to hold the Panchayat elections under the new dispensation
1996 Dec.,	The 73 rd Amendment was extended to Scheduled Areas

Table 1: Time line of the evolution of Panchayati raj institution in India

Source: Empowering Women Panchayat Members (Publ, RGF)

The above "Table" indicates quite clearly the process and the number of years that went into establishing this grass root institution.

2.1. Facts About Women's Position in Politics and Empowerment

Simply stated empowerment means increasing the economic, political, social, gender and educational strength of an individual entity. Empowerment as a concept in the context of women was adopted in the conference in Beijing 1995, Beijing Declaration (sec 13) pointed out women empowerment as an essential indicator for development in the following words:

" women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society including participation in decision –making process and access, are fundamental for achievement of equality , development and peace."

As per Amnesty USA, Dadalos, USA, women account for fifty percent of world population but their presence in the world politics is less than twenty percent (parliament). The so called most powerful country in the world that is in USA women got their right to vote since 1920. Similarly, UN Gender Report says that women perform 66% of the world work produce 50% of the food earn only 10% of the Income yet when it comes to their representation in Governance at national or international level it are quite low. As per 2008(UN division for advancement of women) women occupied only 18% of the parliamentary seats around the world. In another study by global gender Gap Index introduced by World Economic Forum in 2006(this index bench marks national gender gaps on economic, political, educational and health matters) As per 2013 report of this forum India ranked 101 out of 136 countries evaluated well below Philippines or even Srilanka. However this number is expected to increase in the coming years according to a study conducted by Inter parliamentary union (IPU) and the UN There is going to be an equal representation of women in parliaments in the world. Only 21.8% of national parliamentarians were female in July 2013(UN Entity for gender Equality and Empowerment for women) A slow increase from 11.3% in 1995. Interesting to note that Rwanda has highest number of female representatives in parliament where they have won 63.8% of seats in the lower house. As far as India is concerned it

ranks 98th in terms of women's participation in politics is concerned (THE HINDU, March 8, 2011) India lags behind even Pakistan and Nepal.

While there have been various studies on participation of women in politics from time to time, it was Gandhi who had stated and wanted women to be the head of the state. He stated that a combination of constitutional provision, govt., policies, social actions, and self awareness among rural women will eventually result in Indian rural women coming to the forefront (1) Similarly in another study (2) it was found that women's engagement and participation began virtually from a scratch in PRI and that she is still in the process of learning. Other studies on women's participation in PRI were undertaken in Jammu & Kashmir (3) found that in spite of reservation women were not taken seriously. Several other studies (4) in Haryana, India also revealed that constitutional knowledge of women was not satisfactory. It is pertinent to note that studies on participation of women in PRI's in states and union territories in the absence of legislature, particularly in Andaman and Nicobar Islands have not been undertaken on a comprehensive scale. Absence of legislature in this union territory makes the institution of Panchayati Raj all the more meaningful and powerful in these islands. Panchayats through active participation of women representatives can be catalyst in bringing about constructive changes towards the development of these islands.

3. Women in Panchayati Raj

Entry of women into local governance is a relatively new phenomenon compared to their male counterpart. Passing of this Act proved to be a landmark in the history of Local governance in India. The most outstanding feature of this act was the provision of reservation of seats for women in these local bodies.

It was the 73rd amendment to the constitution under Article 243D which mentioned clearly that seats should be reserved for females the provisions of the said Act read as follows:

- Seats shall be reserved as follows
 - The scheduled Castes; and
 - The scheduled Tribes,

In every Panchayat and the seats so reserved shall bear, as nearly as may be proportional to the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in that Panchayat as the population of scheduled castes in that panchayat area or the scheduled tribes in that panchayat area bears to that population of that area and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a panchayat. It further mentions that

(2) Not less than one third of the seats mentioned in clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to scheduled castes and or scheduled tribes as the case may be.

(3) Not less than one third of the seats (including those reserved for women belonging to scheduled caste or scheduled tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women and that such seats should be by rotation allotted to different constituencies in a panchayat.

Similarly clause (4) of the same says that the offices of the Chairpersons shall be reserved for people and women in a manner permitted by the legislature of the states. It also states that not less than one third of the offices of the chairpersons at each level shall be reserved for women.

4. Panchayati Raj and women in Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Andaman and Nicobar Island is a group of islands located in the picturesque Bay of Bengal. It has a population of around 3.85 lakhs with the percentage of males constituting 53.25% and females comprising 46.75% of the total population. The sex ratio (number of females per thousand males) is 876 which are below the national average. Nevertheless participation of women in Panchayati raj institutions has been remarkable. On the promulgation of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Panchayat) Regulation Act 1994 in the light of 73rd constitutional amendment the three tier Panchayat system was introduced for PRI. There are 69 gram panchayats. There are seven panchayat samitis and two Zilla Parishad. Apart from thirty three percent reservations for women in panchayats, reservation also exists for the elected head for each level of panchayats. For the seat of Pradhan who is the elected head of the Gram panchayat women can contest and the seat is reserved for a women candidate after every two elections (ten years) .The same applies for the elected head at the block level which is called the Samiti and its head is "Pramukh". In case of the highest level of the three tiers panchayat the Zilla Parishad which is headed (elected head) by Adhyaksha –the term of this office is one year and the reservation for women is that every third year a women has to be elected from the PRI members for this post.

Since then women of these islands have actively and boldly contested elections as well as demonstrated their management capabilities. With every passing election their representation has been increasing.

Sl. no.	U.T.	No.of Panchayats	Total Representatives	Women Representatives	%age
1.	A & N	75	856	296	34.6
2.	Chandigarh	19	187	62	33.2
3.	Dadra& Nagar Haveli	12	125	49	39.2
4.	Daman&Diu	15	97	37	38.1
5.	Lakshadweep	11	101	38	37.6
6.	Puducherry	108	1021	370	36.2

Table 2: No. of panchayats and elected representatives in all the three tier panchayat in the union territories as on 31st March 2008

Source: GOI, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Annual Report, 2007-08

From the table given above it is quite evident that till 2008 presence of women in the grass root level governance was a mere 34.6% in A & N islands among the lowest in terms of women representative in UT s after Chandigarh. Among the U.Ts the largest representation was from Daman and Diu (39.2%)

Sl. no.	U.T.	No. of Panchayat	Total Representatives	Women Representatives	%age
1.	A&N Islands	67	759	261	34.4
2.	Chandigarh	17	162	53	32.7
3.	D&N Haveli	11	114	45	39.5
4.	Daman & Diu	14	77	30	39.0
5.	Lakshadweep	10	85	32	37.6
6.	Puducherry	98	913	330	36.5

Table 3: Number of Panchayats and elected representatives in village panchayats as on (March31 2008)

Source: GOI, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Annual Report, 2007-08

As per the report published by GOI, at the village level panchayat too women representative in these islands was much lower than in the other union territories.

Sl. No.	U.T	No. of Panchayat	Intermediate Panchayats: Number of Elected Representatives		
			Total	Women	%
				No.	%
1.	A&N Islands	7	67	25	37.3
2.	Chandigarh	1	15	6	40
3.	D&N Haveli	0	0	0	0
4.	Daman& Diu	0	0	0	0
5.	Lakshadweep	0	0	0	0
6.	Puducherry	10	108	40	37

Table 4: Number of Panchayats and elected representatives at the intermediate Panchayats

Source: GOI, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Annual Report, 2007-08

It is interesting to note that of the six union territories only three of these have an intermediate panchayat. Here too A&N islands which has 7 Intermediate panchayats (samiti), number of women representatives was only 25 which accounted for 37.3%, highest representation was in the union territory of Chandigarh.

At the highest level of panchayat that is the district level till 2006 there was only one Zilla Parishad which accounted for 33.3%.

Sl. No.	U.T	No. of Panchayat	District / Zilla Panchayats: Number of Elected Representatives		
			Total	Women	%
				No.	%
1.	A&N Islands	1	30	10	33.33
2.	Chandigarh	1	10	3	30
3.	D&N Haveli	1	11	4	36.36
4.	Daman& Diu	1	20	7	35
5.	Lakshadweep	1	25	9	36
6.	Puducherry		-		

Table 5: Number of Panchayats and the elected representatives in the district Panchayats

Source: GOI, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, annual report 2007-08

Number of elected women representatives in the subsequent election did not register a remarkable increase in the participation of women in panchayat elections except in A&N islands and in Lakshadweep as is evident from the table given below.

Union Territories	Total number of elected Representatives	Number of Women Representatives	%age
A& N Islands	876	326	37.2
Chandigarh	187	62	33.2
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	125	49	39.2
Daman and Diu	97	37	38.1
Lakshadweep	110	41	37.3
Puducherry	1021	370	36.2
All India	2,818,290	1,039,058	36.9

Table 6: Representation of women in Panchayats in the Union Territories (As on 1st July 2011), Panchayat at All Levels

Source: Ministry of Panchayati Raj Govt. of India and Directorate of Economics and Statics A&N islands.

Institutions	Total seats	Women Elected	%age
Gram Panchayat	776	286	36.85
Panchayat Samiti	69	28	40.57
Zilla Parishad	31	12	38.70

Table 7: Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj institution at all the three tiers of Panchayat in Andaman and Nicobar Islands as on 31-12-2011

Source: A report of Role of Panchayat Bodies in Rural Development since 1959, by VN Alok - Academia.edu_files

4.1. Are the Elected Women Representatives Empowered in A&N ISLANDS?

As we celebrate twenty years of Panchayati Raj in our country we still have miles to go in terms of representation of women

- With every succeeding panchayat election women have been able to enhance their representation, beyond 33% reservation as mandated in the constitution. As per data available (on 31-12-2011) elected women representatives constituted 37.21% of the total representatives in all the three tiers of the panchayat taken together. Their representation has certainly registered an increase from 34.2% (in the 2005 elections) to 37.21 %
- Maximum representation has been at the Intermediate level (40.57%) and least at the village panchayat level.
- Gradually they are coming to the forefront and exuding a confidence which was hitherto unseen.
- Judged by certain indicators of empowerment such decision making ability, ability to understand the public, ability to ensure community participation, it can be said around twenty five percent of women are empowered in these islands.

5. Steps taken to enhance empowerment among the women in Panchayati raj institutes in the islands

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj initiated a scheme titled Panchayat Mahila Evam yuva shakti Abhiyan. This scheme has been started to address the lack of technical knowledge, communication and administrative skill to fulfill their leadership role. It also encourages the women to utilize their collective strength. Activities undertaken so far under this scheme in the islands are

- Training Program
- State Level Sammelan
- Divisional district level Sammelan
- Orientation Program
- Sensitization program of EWR has been conducted.

SL. No.	Name of the UT	Tiers of Panchayati Raj System					
		Village Panchayat		Intermediate Panchayat		District Panchayat	
		No. of Women Representatives elected more than one term	% Women representatives elected more than one term	No. of Women representatives elected more than one term	% Women representatives elected more than one term	No. of Women representatives elected more than one term	% Women representatives elected more than one term
1.	A&N islands	12	4.27	3	8.82	Nil	Nil

Table 8: Multi termer Elected Women Representatives for more than one term in Panchayats at A & N islands

Source: V N Alok, A Report of Role of Panchayat Bodies in Rural Dev. Since 1959 ,Academia files 2012-13

The above table shows that the number of women representatives elected more than one term at village panchayat level is just 4.27% in this union territory. Here too in terms of repeated participation of women in panchayat election, it has been observed that at intermediate level their performance is better (8.82%).

6. Conclusion and Suggestions for Enhancing the Empowerment of Women in Panchayat in A & N Islands:

- Participation of women at the lowest level of Panchayat that is Village level has to be increased. In terms of multi-termer participants too it is observed that once (that is in one election) they participate thereafter they are reluctant to contest the election at village level for more than once. The reason may be attributed to the fact that responsibilities at home, inexperience, illiteracy prevent them from seeking active participation for the second time.
- Mindsets of the people have to be changed before bringing about legislative changes
- Reservation of seats for women up to 50% has been adopted in the states of AP, Bihar whereas these Islands have yet to adopt this reservation.
- The Presence of Patriarchal system in our society acts as a deterrent in the active participation of the women. What is needed therefore is counseling of the male members both, before the elections and after elections in order encourage their female counter parts to actively participate.
- It has often been observed that the male members interfere in the proceedings of the meetings and take decisions on their behalf in their absence which is certainly not a good practice. This makes their representation ineffective.

- Training programs for women PRI members should be undertaken on a continuing basis. Though there exists only one such program that is PMEYSA it is not sufficient. Training should be provided not just on continuous basis also it should be comprehensive so as to make them aware of their rights and discharge their responsibilities in an impartial manner.
- Conduct of study tours to other states and union territories can provide them with the much needed exposure and also acquire knowledge about innovative methods which is being practiced else where. So that they can implement the same in their constituency
- A minimum quorum for the women representatives at the gram Sabha meetings is being practiced in a number of states in India. It should be adopted in these islands as this will further emphasize the importance and empowerment of women
- Honorarium given to the Women PRI should be increased so that it provides them with an incentive to actively and voluntarily come forward. This will certainly draw more women to contest election
- Ngo's can play role in mobilizing and encouraging their participation. Issues like drinking water, sanitation, toilets will be attended to on a priority basis if women representatives are elected in more numbers.
- Last but not the least problem of alcoholism can also be addressed if women elected representative strongly assert themselves.

The present study may be looked upon as a precursor to a more detailed and comprehensive study based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire covering the entire island, (which could not be done due to constraints of resources) which might help and provide policy makers to design programs to enhance participation of women and bringing about positive changes in these beautiful islands.

7. References

1. Ruchi Tyagi, South Asia Politics, vol.6(3). June20
2. Dayanidhi Parida, "Women & Panchayati Raj-A study" in Orissa review, Feb.-march, 2010)
3. Shashi Kaul & Sahni, Stud.Home Comm. Sci., 3(1):29-31(2009)
4. Vikas Nandal, Intl. Journal of Social Sciences, Vol,2(12), 47-50, Dec.(2013)
5. D.Bandyopadhyay and Amitava Mukherjee, Empowering Women panchayat Members, Publ., for Task Force on Panchayati Raj, Rajiv Gandhi Foundation
6. Govt. Of India, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Annual Report, 2007-08
7. Ministry of Panchayati Raj Govt. of India & Directorate of Economics and statistics A & N Islands 2008
8. V N Alok, A Report of Role of Panchayat Bodies in Rural Dev. Since1959 ,Academia files 2012-13