



## 1. A Study of Performance, Participation and Perspectives of Elected Women Panchayat Leaders

( With special reference to Sehore District of Madhya Pradesh)

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### Abstract

*India is a democratic nation and democracy entails equality for all humans without any discrimination. Indian democracy has given equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens to participate in the political field from local governance to national constitutional institutes of India without any special conditions. It was in the year 1992 that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act brought radical changes in women's representation in local bodies. This amendment was seen as the means of decentralization of power at grassroot level. The 73rd Amendment Act has been hailed as an important landmark in constitutional development as it created space for women's participation in politics and decision-making by reserving one-third of seats at village councils all over India. Madhya Pradesh has been a pioneer state in implementing local self-governance after the 73rd and 74th amendments were made in the Indian constitution in 1993. But is the impact of this process is visible at ground levels as it was assumed? Based on the primary data, the present paper attempts to explore and analyse the position of elected women Panchayat leaders in terms of their performance, participation in local panchayat activities, decision-making processes, and perspective with special reference to the Sehore district of Madhya Pradesh.*

**Keywords:** Women, elected Panchayat Leaders, participation, awareness

### Introduction

India is the largest democratic country in the world. Democracy is considered the best form of government in which every individual participates by means of voting rights and in which the people remain the sovereign power determining their leaders. The Indian Constitution, which came into effect in 1950 details the powers of the Central and State governments. It also clearly states in one of its Articles that the state should endeavour to organize village panchayats and endow them with powers and authority as may be necessary for them to function as units of local self-government. In Indian context, the self-governing local bodies in rural areas are described as institutions of democratic decentralization or Panchayat Raj. This was considered a political and administrative innovation of far-reaching importance when it was first introduced in 1959. The



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structure and process of Panchayats are equally fundamental as they bring to bear and give the right responsibility to members therein to perform.

India is a democratic nation and democracy entails equality for all humans without any discrimination. Indian democracy has given equal rights to all its citizens and all Indians have equal rights and opportunities to participate in the political field from local governance to national constitutional institutes of India. In spite of this equal opportunity as enshrined in the Indian Constitution women are excluded from different walks of life which is more visible in politics.

Ever since the onset of the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78), India has been making a remarkable shift in its approach towards women's issues from welfare to development while keeping women's empowerment as the central issue in determining the status of women in society. National Perspective Plan for women recognized the importance of political participation of women and suggested 30 percent reservation for women to be introduced at all levels of elective bodies. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73<sup>rd</sup> & 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments of the Constitution in 1993 laid a strong foundation for the participation of women in decision-making elected bodies by providing 33 % seat reservation in Panchayat Raj Institutions.

73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment was a landmark decision for women's empowerment through political means. The reservation criteria of India aim to strengthen the participation of disadvantaged groups, such as women, in the local governance system. However, even after more than two decades, women's active participation remains a challenge. Empirical studies point out to various discriminating social structures and mechanisms as factors limiting women's participation.

### **Women and Political Participation in India**

U.N. observes that women constitute the world's largest excluded category. Historically women remained entirely excluded from the traditional Caste Panchayats, Village Panchayats, and in the British scheme of local governments in India. The prevalent practice during 1960's and 1970's was the co-option of two women at best for each Panchayat Institution as suggested by The B.R. Mehta committee in 1956, because women could not come through direct elections.

Women irrespective of caste, creed, region, and religion have been exploited in many forms and denied their rights basically due to social constraints like a rigid patriarchal system, illiteracy, religious beliefs, and above all the uneven gender division of work for women and men. Women's roles were limited to household work, caring and nurturing children and elders, and the economy of the family was mainly in the hands of men. Politics as well as the decision-making process was considered an exclusively male domain. The concern for women's political equality in India first emerged as a political issue only with the setting up of Committee on the Status of Women in India



(CSWI) in 1971. A report of CSWI in 1974 called 'Towards Equality' revealed the vulnerable status of women in politics on account of their minority and dependent position. The report suggested for more representation and meaningful association of women in local administration. The report recommended establishment of Statutory Women's panchayats at the village level, reservation of seats in municipalities, and programs for women's welfare and development.

Women occupy only 66 seats out of 543 in Lok Sabha, which is a mere 12%. The status of women Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) across all state assemblies in India is further low, with the national average being at 9%. Bihar, Rajasthan and Haryana states are the best among all with 14% representation while the worst states are Pondicherry and Nagaland, which have no women MLAs at all (The Quota Project, 2015).

**Table-1: India's Rank as per Women's Representation in Politics in Different Groups**

Groups	Total Countries	India's Rank
Global	141 <sup>1</sup>	103 <sup>rd</sup>
Asia	18	13 <sup>th</sup>
SAARC	8	5 <sup>th</sup>
BRICS	5	4 <sup>th</sup>

Source: The Quota Project, 2015-[www.quotaproject.org](http://www.quotaproject.org)

Madhya Pradesh has been a pioneer state in implementing local self-governance after the 73rd and 74th amendments were made in the Indian constitution in 1993. But is the impact of this process visible at ground levels as was assumed? The State faces several challenges regarding leadership of women – whether the leadership is at the level of political parties, administrative posts or at municipalities or panchayat level. Even 13 years after implementation of local self-governance system, women have to do a lot of struggles to maintain their dignity in the system. (Mondal *et.al*, 2014).

### **The 73rd Amendment of the Constitution**

It was in the year 1992 that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act brought radical changes in women's representation in local bodies. This amendment was seen as the means of decentralization of power at grassroot level. Also, this Amendment has been hailed as an important landmark in constitutional development as it created space for women's participation in politics and decision-making by reserving one-third seats at village councils all over India. As per Clause (2) and (3) of Article 243 (d), not less than one-third of seats meant for direct election of members at each tier of the Panchayats are to be reserved for women. However, some States have gone beyond the mandated 33% and provided more reservations for women like Bihar, Rajasthan, and Madhya

<sup>1</sup> 141 countries were ranked out of total 190 countries of the world.



Pradesh have reserved 50% of seats for women in Panchayats and Sikkim reserved 40% of seats for women (Singh, 2012). The political reservation for women has changed the face of male-dominated mainstream politics in India (Ghodke, 2011). Although the number of women at various levels of political activity has risen considerably, women are still under-represented in governance and decision-making positions.

Elected women representatives, both as members and as Sarpanch, continue to face several institutional and social barriers. At the institutional level, the capacity of members to implement reforms, institutionalize accountability systems, decentralize functions and active engagement of women play a role in determining whether women are able to emerge as political agents and actors (Mukhopadhyay, 2005). Social barriers include lack of education, lack of respect for women in PRIs, physical violence against women in the public and domestic spheres, and oppressive patriarchal and caste structures (Jayal, 2006).

### **Present Study**

The present research study has been carried out in the Sehore district of Madhya Pradesh state of India. In the present study women elected as sarpanch, up-sarpanch and panch forms the sample and are known as respondents. Two-level sampling method was used for sampling. First of all, the list of all elected women sarpanch, up-sarpanch, and panch was collected from the block statistical department. Then women representatives were selected by adopting random sampling through a lottery system and on the basis of the availability of elected women during research and their consent for participating in the research. Thus, from the list of total elected women representative sample of 160 respondents from 5 blocks of the Sehore district were taken for the present study. For the present study, both Secondary and Primary data were collected for the study purpose. Primary data was collected from respondents by adapting an unstructured interview schedule, observation, and case studies. Case studies and observation method were included in this research to get more detailed information on the participation of women in panchayat, perceptions, and challenges they face.

The present research is an attempt to understand the socio economic and political background of the women representatives, the nature and extent of women's participation and role performance in the decision-making process of Panchayats, and the obstacles that have been faced by women representatives to play an effective role as PRI member with reference to Sehore District. Women representatives—panch, sarpanch, and up-sarpanch from village panchayats of the district were the unit and object of analysis of the study.

### **Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Discussion**

Analysis and interpretation have been presented under the following sections in accordance with the objectives of the study—



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- Socioeconomic and political backgrounds of women representatives
  - Political awareness among women representatives
  - Political participation and role performance

### **Socio-economic Profile of Respondents**

The socio-economic details were assessed based on the respondent's age, education, caste marital status, family type, occupation, and annual income. It was found that the entrance in panchayat is without any bias on economic background of women respondents which clearly explains that after introduction of reservation policy in panchayat, women are coming out and contesting elections in panchayats. While on the other hand, study shows that age and marital status of women entering in panchayat politics play crucial role.

**Age-**Maximum numbers of respondents 41.90% belong to the middle-aged group (35-49 years) followed by 38.10 % from the old age group (50 and above) and the rest 20 % of the respondents were from the young age group (20-34). The data on age group indicates that middle aged women are more actively involved in local governance and this finding matches with the study of Mishra (1977) which pointed out that rural leadership is emerging out from middle aged groups.

**Education-** One third number of respondents were illiterate (33.13 %) followed by respondents educated up to primary level (29.37 %). 19.37 % respondents were educated up to middle school while 11.25 % have gone to high school. If we talk about higher secondary education only 5.0 % respondents were there and only 3 respondents (1.88 %) of total were educated up to graduation level. This goes with the low literacy level of females in the district as mentioned in Census 2011 as well as the low enrolment of females in higher education in our state. Similarly, previous studies conducted by Kaur (1999) and Gowda (1998) observed that most of the women leaders in panchayats are low educated while the preference for educated panchayat leaders is growing now but very slowly which is also indicated in the present study.

**Caste-** Majority of respondents come from backward classes and least number are from schedule tribe community (8.75%). The number of schedule caste respondents (16.88) is quite visible showing presence of schedule caste in the district and this statistic goes with the study of Ghosh (1996) who also noticed adequate presentation of women from lower caste in his study. Respondents from the general category are 34.37 % second dominant group after backward classes. Similar findings were reported by Aggarwal (1999) and Geeta & Mishra (2015).

**Marital status-** This study clearly shows the huge involvement of married women (93.12 %) in village panchayats whereas not a single unmarried women member was found in politics in the study area. 9 respondents (5.63%) were widows in the study sample and the rest 1.25 % were divorcees.





**Occupation-** Maximum numbers of respondents (39.37%) from study area were engaged in agriculture activities as labours or as cultivators. Then the second leading group was from labour occupation (30.63%) followed by housewives (21.87 %). Occupation is an important index of social status as it leads to command over economic resources, position and role in society, and life chances. Malik (2002) and Samria (2015) also noted similar trends in their studies and stated that most women participating in local politics in rural areas hail from the agriculturist occupation.

**Annual income-** Analysing the facts as told by respondents, the annual income of most of the respondents (55%) was in the medium category ranging between Rs. 31000 to Rs. 100000 per annum. 26.87 % respondents were having low income of up to Rs.30000 and only 18.13 % respondents were from high income group. This shows that persons from lower and middle-income groups are participating in rural politics showing that politics is not the only affair of higher income group and previous study done by Raabe et.al (2009) also noted similar findings.

### Political Background

Responsibilities and duties of representatives are based on the positions occupied by them in panchayats. As per Table 2 respondents occupying the position of sarpanch is 18.12%, upsarpanch 8.12 % and the maximum number of respondents were panch (73.76 %).

**Table: 2- Position of Respondents in Panchayats**

Sr. No.	Position occupied in panchayat	Frequency (N=160)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Sarpanch	29	18.12
2.	Upsarpanch	13	8.12
3.	Panch	118	73.76

### Political Experience of Elected Women Panchayat Leaders

Data in Table 3 interprets that 124 (77.5 %) respondents are first-time entrants in panchayat politics while only 22.5 % of women contested elections earlier of which 4 contested for sarpanch (panchayat president) post, 1 for upsarpanch and 31 contested for panch (ward members) posts.

**Table: 3- Respondents contested the Election previously**

S. No.	Contested elections previously	Frequency (N=160)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Yes	36	22.5



	If yes which post	Sarpanch	4	11.11
		Upsarpanch	1	2.78
		Panch	31	86.11
2.	<b>No</b>		<b>124</b>	<b>77.5</b>

On discussion with these women respondents, it was found that reservation for women in panchayats plays an important role in providing opportunities for empowerment of women in local governance. Because, in absence of reservation women would have not received such platform to learn as well as increase their knowledge and awareness on political participation.

### Reasons/Influences to join Panchayat—

**Table: 4- Reasons/Influences to join Panchayat**

S. No.	Reasons/Influences	Frequency (N=160)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Self-interest	39	24.37
2.	Reservation	54	33.75
3.	Influence of Family members	67	41.88

On enquiring the reasons and influences that compelled the respondents to join panchayat as elected representatives it was found that a mere 24.37 % of respondents join due to self-interest while the majority of respondents joined panchayat due to the influence of their family members followed by 33.75 % respondents who joined due to reservation of seats for women. It shows that reservation has played a vital role in influencing women from rural communities to join panchayat but family's consent is of most importance. Similar findings were reported in previous studies of Jayal (2005) and Ban & Rao (2008) who also concluded that family plays an important role behind the reason of women's participation in panchayats.

### Family members help in Panchayat Works—

**Table: 5—Involvement of family members in Panchayat Works**

S. No.	Family members involvement	Frequency (N=160)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Yes	143	89.37
2.	No	17	10.63



Involvement of family members in panchayat activities when women are elected as representatives is seen very much in almost all over India. The data of Table 5 also interprets that 89.37 % of respondents said that their family members help them in panchayat work while only 10.63 % of respondents said that they don't receive help from family members. This result is similar to the earlier findings of Brody (2009), Parida (2010), and Mallik (2011) that family member's involvement is prominent when a woman is elected as a representative.

### **Political Awareness of Elected Women Leaders**

Awareness about the existing political system is essential for the efficient and meaningful participation of the members in politics at any level. Here political awareness mainly indicates the knowledge of respondents on structural and functional aspects of panchayati raj institutions like knowledge on the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment, panchayat structure, funds allocation, development programs of government in panchayats, complaining procedure, functions of gram sabha.

### **Knowledge about the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act**

73 Constitutional Amendment is one of the most remarkable events in the political history of India mainly after independence. This amendment resulted in several radical changes in the traditional institution of panchayat including introduction of three tier panchayat system and most importantly providing the reservation to women, SCs and STs in all levels and all positions. That is why knowledge of this historical change among women was asked.

**Table: 6- Knowledge about 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA**

S. No.	Knowledge about 73 <sup>rd</sup> CAA	Frequency (N=160)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Have knowledge	13	8.12
2.	No knowledge	147	91.88

Data in table 6 clearly denotes that knowledge about the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment among women respondents is extremely low. Only 8.12 % women said that they have heard about this amendment but they have little knowledge about some significant features of this Act. While on the other hand majority of respondents (91.88 %) don't know about the Amendment. This certainly reflects the less political consciousness of rural women about political developments in the country. Thus, it seems that women in rural politics lack the motivation and spirit of true democratic decentralization pertaining to women empowerment which is the key agenda of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment.

### **Knowledge on Structure of Panchayat system**





Knowing the structure of any institution and the pattern of its organisation is very important to work in it efficiently. Respondents were asked about the various structural aspects of panchayat systems and the data collected is presented in the table 7.

**Table: 7- Knowledge on Structural aspects of Panchayat**

Structural aspects	Category	Frequency (N=160)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
M.P. Panchayat Raj Act	Yes	13	8.12
	No	141	88.12
	No comments	6	3.76
Three tier panchayat system	Full knowledge	114	71.25
	No knowledge	43	26.87
	No comments	3	1.88
Women reservation in panchayats	Full knowledge	144	90.00
	No knowledge	16	10.00
	No comments	0	0.00
Number of wards and panch in their gram panchayat	Full knowledge	76	47.50
	No knowledge	78	48.75
	No comments	6	3.75
Chairperson of district panchayat	know	56	35.00
	Don't know	104	65.00

The table 7 represents that respondent's knowledge level on the structural aspects of panchayat is not very satisfactory. Only 8.12 % women were aware of Panchayati Raj Act of Madhya Pradesh state but on the other hand 90 % respondents were aware of reservation of seats for women in panchayat levels whereas 10 % women have no knowledge about reservation. Though 71.25 % of respondents have knowledge on three tier panchayat system but only 35.00 % women are familiar about the Chairperson of district panchayat. In Madhya Pradesh gram panchayats are divided in minimum 10 wards and maximum 20 wards with one panch elected for each ward. At Janpad



(Block) and Zilla (District) level the area is divided into constituencies not exceeding 25 and 35 constituencies respectively; and one member is elected for each constituency. On asking the number of wards and panch elected in their gram panchayats it was found that 47.50% respondents have knowledge about it and 48.75 % women don't know while 6 (3.75 %) women said nothing about the number of wards and panch in their gram panchayat. These findings show that knowledge level among women representatives regarding the structure of panchayat is low and it coincide with the earlier findings of Dubey (2013) and Beaman *et. al* (2006).

While discussing on the issue of reservation and participation of women in rural politics most of the women respondents said that women are getting chance to contest elections only where the seat is reserved. Women have no knowledge about which seat is reserved and which is not and they have to rely only on information as given by male members of society. During group discussion in Gadiya panchayat of Ichhawar janpad many people told about '*purush seat*'. On enquiring they said that seats are reserved for women, SC & ST on rotation basis and when it is not reserved then it is *purush* (male) seat.

### **Awareness about Functional aspects of Panchayats**

Madhya Pradesh state enacted the M.P. Panchayati Raj Act in 1994 and updated it as needed in order to structure and strengthen the PRIs of the state. This act enables gram panchayat and its representatives to perform their functions properly. Knowledge level of respondents about various activities of gram panchayat and their involvement were analyzed.

**Awareness about fund allocation in panchayats-** funds plays an important role in working of panchayats. Table 8 shows that only 7 (4.37%) women respondents have full awareness about fund allocation in panchayats for various activities and 48.75% of respondents have partial knowledge while a remarkable number of respondents were there who have no knowledge on fund allocation process in their panchayats. The data reveals that now interest among women is increasing to participate and understand the fund allocation system of panchayat.

**Table: 8 Awareness about Fund Allocation**

S. No.	Awareness level	Frequency (N=160)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Full knowledge	07	4.37
2.	Partial knowledge	78	48.75
3.	No knowledge	75	46.88

**Knowledge on Development Programs of Government -** The panchayat is the implementing agency of all kinds of development programs of the government and functionaries of panchayats are supposed to have proper and complete knowledge on implementation of those programs.

**Table: 9- Knowledge on Government's Development Programs**

S. No.	Awareness level	Frequency (N=160)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Full knowledge	42	4.37
2.	Partial Knowledge	67	48.75
3.	No knowledge	51	46.88

Data shown in table 9 interprets that 42 women were having full knowledge on various development programs of government while 51 were having no knowledge. Data also shows that involvement of women is increasing in gaining knowledge on programs being run by government in their panchayats. This shows that slowly women are taking interests in working of panchayats.

**Knowledge about Functions of Panchayats**— all panchayats perform many obligatory and discretionary works for the development of the area and its people as well. Data of table 10 interprets that 23.75 % women were having full knowledge about functions of panchayat and 49.37% have partial knowledge while 26.88% respondents were having no knowledge on panchayat's functions.

**Table: 10- Knowledge about Panchayat's Functions**

S. No.	Awareness level	Frequency (N=160)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Full knowledge	38	23.75
2.	Partial knowledge	79	49.37
3.	No knowledge	43	26.88

The data analysis of knowledge on structural and functional aspects of gram panchayat reveals that women respondents have fair knowledge about panchayat's works and activities although most of them have only basic awareness but if given a chance women can gain knowledge from work experience.

**Participation in panchayat meetings**—participation in panchayat meetings provides a chance to voice issues of one's interest and people's development. But at the same time extent to which women representatives participates is affected by many reasons which includes their knowledge, ability to speak in public, acceptance of their ideas, and others. In present research, an attempt has been made to explore the participation of women respondents in meetings and associated factors.

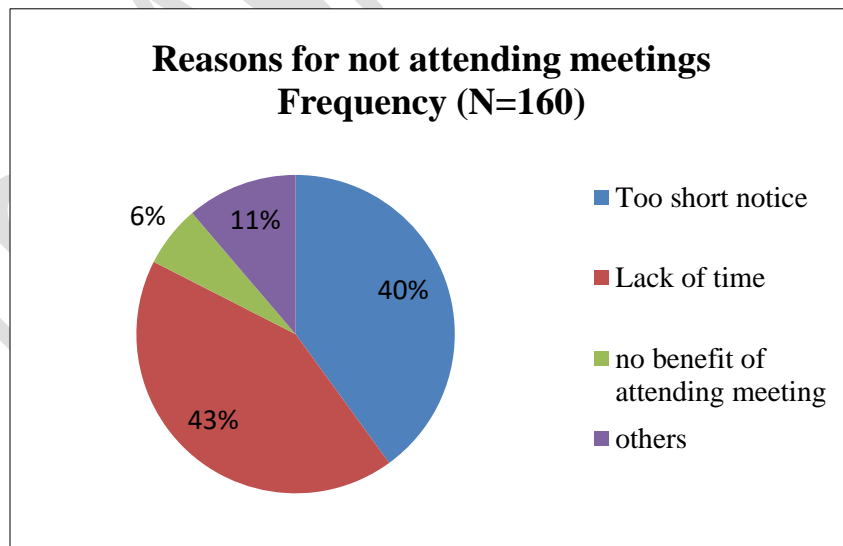
**Table: 11— Attending Panchayat Meetings**



S. No.	Regularity	Frequency (N=160)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Always	58	36.62
2.	Rarely	90	56.23
3.	Never	12	7.5

Table 11 shows that 36.62% of the total respondents participated in this study said that they attended the panchayat meetings always whereas 56.23% of respondents rarely attended the meetings. On the other hand, 12 respondents admitted that they never attended panchayat meetings. On asking the reasons about not attending or rarely attending the meetings (Fig 1) majority of respondents said that information of meeting is given in very short notice and in that case it is not possible for respondents to make it for the meetings. 43 % respondents said that due to lack of time they don't attend meetings. Their most of time is dedicated to house chores along with labour work so they don't have time for meetings. 11 % respondents do not attend panchayat meetings due to other reasons (like not in village at time of meeting or due to illness) while 6% said that

use to go but no use to meetings now they meetings. noted that respondents are and/or then elected too, the their work



earlier they they find it of attend the therefore, don't attend This is to be most of the in the research housewives labours and becoming an representative burden of increases.

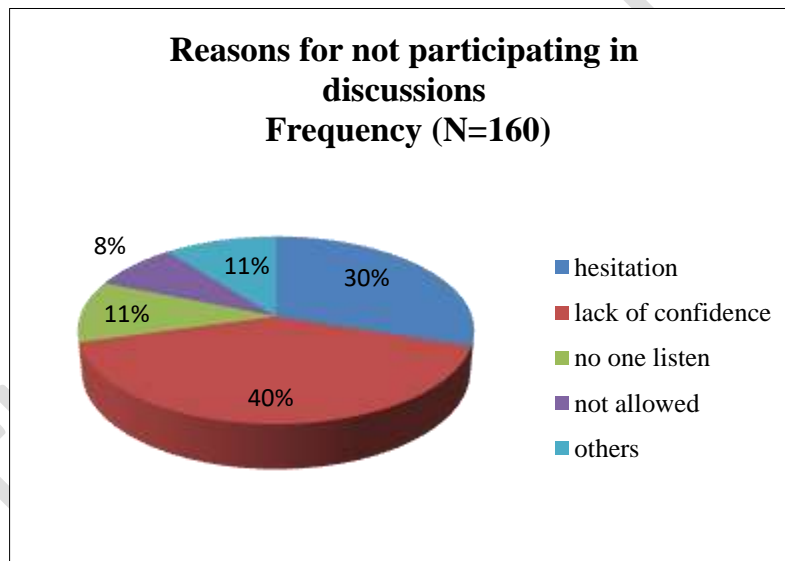
Fig. 1- Reasons for not attending meetings

**Taking part in discussions in panchayat meetings**—Table 12 represents those 67 women actively took part in discussions held during panchayat meetings whereas 81 women rarely showed their interest in discussions. Of the total respondents, 12 said that they never took any part in discussions of panchayat proceedings.

**Table: 12-Participation in discussions of panchayat meetings**

S. No.	Regularity	Frequency (N=160)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Frequently	67	41.87
2.	Rarely	81	50.63
3.	Never	12	7.50

On enquiring the reasons of not taking part in discussions of panchayat meetings it was found that around 40 % women don't participate due to lack of confidence and this is basically because they don't have sufficient knowledge on panchayat works (Fig 2). 30 % respondents told that they hesitate to speak in presence of villagers mainly elders because it is not considered good. 11 % women said that nobody listens to women's suggestion and 8 % women were of opinion that they are not supposed to speak in panchayat works.



**Fig. 2— Reasons for not participating in discussions**



## Involvement of male members of family

An attempt has been made to explore the involvement of male members of family of respondents in panchayat's activities.

**Table: 13-Involvement of Male Members of Family**

Involvement	Response	Frequency (N=160)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male members involved	Yes	117	73.12
	No	43	26.88
Relation	Husband	89	76.07
	Others	28	23.93
Kind of support	Suggestions in panchayat activities	102	87.17
	Take them to meetings	98	83.76
	Monitoring of activities	56	47.86
	Paper works	72	61.53
	Communication with community	93	79.48

Table 13 shows that 73.12 % of respondents take necessary advice and suggestions from male members of their family. In majority of respondent's cases (76.07 %) husbands are involved. Only 26.88 % respondents told that they do not take any support from their family members. On exploring the kind of support that respondents take it was found that 87.17% women took suggestion in panchayat activities, 83.76 % respondents are dependent on male members to take them to attend panchayat meetings, 47.86 % respondents told that they take help of male members in monitoring of panchayat activities, 61.53% respondents take support in paper works and 79.48% women take support in communicating with villagers. This shows that women have not been empowered effectively and they are yet to prepare themselves to perform their role independently in decision making process. This also indicates indirect domination of male members in society and politics.





## Performance in Rural Development Works

Women empowerment through participation in panchayat mainly depends on the actual participation of women in the decision-making process of PRIs and role performance in planning, initiating, and implementing of development programs at the panchayat level. Women respondents were asked about their performances in administrative works, public works and social works that are conducted in panchayat as obligatory and discretionary activities. Most of the women were not able to understand these works. So to simplify they were asked about activities in which they were involved or topics of interest that are mostly discussed in panchayat meetings. It was found that the majority of women were involved in construction works like the construction of roads, bundings, buildings (community hall, Anganwadi centre, etc.), 153 respondents took part in the Swachh Bharat campaign, 108 women associated with the pradhan mantri awas yojana, 117 women participated in providing pension schemes and 98 in providing BPL cards. 76 were involved in promoting girls education in their villages and 9 women respondents never participated in any activities of panchayats. Seeing the trend of involvement it could be said that in rural areas development work is mostly associated with infrastructure development, road construction, and social entitlements like pensions and BPL cards. Still issues like discrimination, poverty, education, and awareness are not included.

**Table: 14-Participation in Rural Development Works**

S. No.	Works	Number of Respondents involved
1.	Construction of roads	149
2.	Other construction works (buildings, bundings, toilets, etc.)	154
3.	PM Awas Yojana	108
4.	Pension	117
5.	BPL card	98
6.	Encouraging women to attend panchayat meetings	76
7.	Involvement in promoting girls education	115
8.	Involvement in swachh bharat abhiyan	151
9.	Plantation	68
10.	No involvement at all	09

During research, it was also observed that majority of villagers did not attend gram sabhas. Even if they attend, very little deliberation occurred. Neither the people nor the gram panchayat members are sufficiently educated to understand the significance and relevance of the panchayat meetings.



In most cases, these meetings served as platforms for identifying beneficiaries for certain government schemes like the below poverty line (BPL) scheme, pension, ration card, etc, which entitles members to subsidized housings, loans and food.

### **Discussion on Women's Issues**

One of the main reasons for including women in rural politics was the fact that if women are involved in local politics than the women issues will be addressed effectively and properly. This idea allows women to play an important role in development progress particularly on issues directly concerning them. In this perspective, an attempt was made to explore whether women issues are brought into discussion in panchayat meetings or not and how relevance women issues are in rural politics.

**Table: 15-Discussion on Women Issues**

S. No.	Discussions on women's development	Frequency (N=160)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Frequently held	12	7.5
2.	Rarely held	129	80.63
3.	No need	19	11.87

Data in Table 15 interprets women's issues are not of much concern in rural politics as 80.63 % of respondents said that discussion on women's development is rarely held in panchayats as mostly male members do not show any interest in women-specific development issues. 7.5 % of women were there who said that women's issues were frequently discussed. 11.87 % respondents were of opinion that there is no need to discuss on women's issues separately and on asking why they said because women issues are already included in the general development. As a matter of fact, it was observed during research that women have benefitted indirectly from most of the development programs implemented in panchayats but hardly any discussion or decision have been taken on women-oriented issues in the panchayats under study. Although a number of government schemes and policies are focused on women's empowerment but there appears a gap between existing policies in papers and its implementation on field. Women-related issues are not taken into account until it affects majority of the population of the village. For instance, alcoholism, road connectivity for proper conveyance, higher education of girls, and schools for them are some issues which respondents shared while the discussions talking to them.

### **Constraints faced by Women while Participating in Panchayat**

Women of rural society in India face many problems and difficulties and the main causes of such problems are mainly social customs, traditions, patriarchal system due to which it is difficult for women to come out of the four walls of their home and perform public works. To explore the



constraints faced by women an attempt was made to know the views of women representatives regarding problems of rural women.

**Table: 16-Constraints Faced by Women**

S. No.	Kind of problems faced	Frequency (N=160)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Male dominance	16	10.00
2.	Lack of financial independence	26	16.25
3.	Lack of education	36	22.50
4.	Resistance of family members for panchayat works	13	8.13
5.	Over burden of household work	23	14.37
6.	Lack of knowhow on panchayat works and consciousness	16	10.00
7.	Social burden being a woman	23	14.37
8.	No comments	7	4.38

Table 16 shows that the majority of women (22.50 %) were of the opinion that lack of education is the main constraint for women to participate in panchayat activities, followed by 16.25% of respondents who said that financial dependency on family is one of the major constraints faced by women. 14.37 % women said that due to overburden of household works most of the rural women have no time to attend and participate in meetings. Similarly, 14.37 % of women accounted for the social burden that women have to bear as a major constraint for not actively participating in panchayat activities. Women in rural areas are not supposed to talk openly with male members or else they have to face character blaming; time is another restriction as they cannot work outside after evening. There is also a daughter-in-law factor which strictly works in rural areas and accordingly women being a daughter-in-law are not allowed to talk to other men, unveiling their faces in public.

10% of respondents said that male dominance is a problem that rural women face while 10 % of women raised the issue of lack of knowledge on panchayat activities and consciousness due to no or less knowledge makes women unable to participate in rural politics. There were around 8 % of respondents who said that many families oppose women's participation in panchayats. 7 respondents have no idea about the constraints and problems faced by rural women.



## Perception of Women Respondents on Reservation

The concept of perception is one of the popular approaches in leadership behavioural research. As per the views of Charlesworth (1969) the behavioural approach is able to deliver reliable knowledge with regard to political commonplace. Political knowledge and political behaviour are inseparable. To explore the perception of respondents on women empowerment through reservation and entry in panchayats questions included in the schedule were administered to them and are represented in forms of frequency of numbers. The data is represented in table 17 and it interprets that majority of women (60.62 %) are happy with the reservation and their entry in panchayati raj systems. They said that it is only due to reservations that women are in politics. It gave them opportunities to come out and learn due to which their self confidence has increased and increase in self-confidence has been recognised as a key indicator of individual empowerment. Similar findings were found in studies of Datta (1998) that self-confidence of women in panchayats rise due to the respect and social recognition they get being as panchayat representative.

**Table: 17—Perception on Women's Empowerment**

S. No.	perception	Frequency (N=160)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1.	Positive	97	60.62
2.	No change	47	29.38
3.	No comments	16	10.00

The data in Table 17 shows that 16 respondents have no reaction regarding the reservation policy for women in panchayats and their entry to it. While 29.38% women said that though there is reservation but not much has changed for women. Still, women are supposed to remain inside the house and perform duties for the family. They said that women are representative just for name sake and their work is done by their male family members.

## Conclusion

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment was a vital institutional change, envisaging 33% reservation of seats for women in PRIs. This historical move brought a huge number of women in decision making process which was very miniscule before 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA. Thus, it can be concluded that political decentralization at the panchayat level with reservation for women has been remarkably effective as an adequate number of women have been elected in PRI bodies, which is a landmark in democratic history as well as in the political participation of women in India. The study establishes the fact that the entry and participation of women in leadership position is not hindered by their



caste, education, occupation, and income status. Thus it can be concluded that women would definitely fit into the hard patriarchal social frameworks inspite of all odds and that women of Sehore district have been socially getting empowered through grassroot political participations. Reservations for women are the most important factor for motivating them to come forward and participate in politics. Whereas large numbers of women were influenced by the male members of their family to join the panchayat politics and that most of these members were associated with some political backgrounds. Thus, it can be concluded that family support especially consent of male members plays an important role in promoting or restricting women to enter PRIs. The study presents that political awareness among women regarding the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment, structural aspects of the panchayat, reservation policy, fund allocation, functional aspects of panchayats, and development programs and schemes of panchayats is very low concluding that political consciousness among women is very less and that women are adequately elected in PRIs but they are not informative to the desired extent. Political participation of women respondents and their role performance in the present study has been not very effective though women tried to participate in politics and raised their opinions but sadly they are not heard most of the time thus discouraging women.

Women face many constraints while participating in grassroot politics. Structural obstacles due to discriminatory practices and institutions still limit women's options to lead. Women are less likely than men to have the education, contacts, and resources needed to become effective leaders. Comprising half of the world's population, women continue to be under-represented as voters, political leaders, and elected officials. It is basically due to the dependence of women on their family members whether economically, morally, or due to lack of awareness. Economic dependence further constrains the movement and decision-making ability of women representatives. Thus, we can conclude that though women are socially and politically empowered through the PRIs they are yet to be empowered economically. The government of India as well as Madhya Pradesh are trying to empower women through various economic, social and political policies and programs but there are still some gaps to be bridged. Findings of present study show the reservation for women in the panchayats motivates them to come forward in political field. It can be concluded that the reservation for women can be an important drive to women's empowerment at the village level but that it is not a guarantee for the participation of the elected women in decision-making. The goal of women 's empowerment will not be accomplished by reservations alone and in situations where there are more limiting than facilitating factors for the entry and participation of women in political fields, which are so many and so diverse. It was found that women's perception towards development was not satisfactory as most of women were involved in routine development works like construction and issues that are pushed by government like shelter schemes, sanitation and cleanliness drives. They are not working on the actual needs of women, girls and their area as a whole. Women's perception towards women's development and empowerment was found to be average. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a huge need of



capacity and knowledge building programs for women representatives as well as need of educating women about strategic needs and practical needs in the context to women's development. Women continue to be viewed through the lenses of traditional stereotypes which are difficult to escape. Based on the observations and experiences shared by women respondents it is found that despite various challenges and issues faced in leadership in local bodies, women are constantly trying to perform better and address various issues of society at large and individuals in particular.

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