
Women in Panchayati Raj System: A Sociological Study of Patna District in Bihar

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ABSTRACT

Even after so many years of independence, no significant change is seen women in Bihar. Even today they are everyday face significant struggles and discrimination. due to patriarchal norms, poverty, lack of land ownership, low female labor participation and literacy gaps. Despite constitutional provisions for upliftment of women. Their struggle is characterized by low literacy rates, and limited access to basic amenities and government schemes. This research paper explores the situation of women in the Panchayati Raj system after getting 50% reservation in the year 2006. Also, it explores the empowerment of women at grass-root level, awareness of non-represented women about political participation in Panchayati Raj and their status by representative women. It is an attempt to show a comparative study based on extensive qualitative in-depth interviews and participant observation in rural areas of Patna district for the study of Representative and Non-Representative women in Panchayati Raj System.

Introduction

The word "empowerment" literally means "to become powerful." Empowerment improves one's positive self-image and ability to distinguish right from bad in private thoughts. Consider how to strengthen women's economic, health, and educational opportunities to empower them. All of these elements are crucial. A new social and economic order can be created on national, international and global scales as a result of encouraging women to value them, feel in charge of their life both within and



outside of the home, and be capable of influencing social change. However, in the majority of cases, women in our culture are still unable to make self-reliant decisions.

The debate over the definition of "empowerment" has moved from one discipline to another. From both the French and Latin perspectives, there have been debates about the meaning of "empowerment" (Lincoln, 1999:3). According to the writers, the word "empower" was first used in print in the 17th century by HamonL' Estrange in his book "The Reign of King Charles." As a result, the term "empowerment" has a wide range of meanings and is difficult to define. The words "sanctioning" and "certifying" had a powerful connotation. In 1849, the Oxford English Dictionary defined "empowerment" as "the action of empowering; the state of being empowered." According to the dictionary, as mentioned above definitions, "empowerment" is a process rather than a thing in and of itself. Empowering someone does not imply granting them power; rather, it entails assisting them in developing their ability.

Panchayati Raj

A "panchayat" refers to a group of five wise and well-respected elders who are chosen by the village and recognised by the rest of the community as such in Sanskrit Gram panchayats are the basic administrative units in the Panchayati Raj system. There are three levels of authority in this game: Village, Block, and District. Each level has its own unique rules. A key belief of Gandhiji's was that self-governing institutions should be established in every Indian village to foster democratic liberties. A village republic, he called them Panchayati Raj systems, after the old Panchayats. As far as the modern time goes, Gandhi envisioned an independent India where the people had a meaningful say in the growth and well-being of their communities, as represented by elected Panchayats. Village Panchayats were incorporated in the State List of the Constitution's Seventh Schedule by our founding father, Dr.BhimraoAmbedkar. However, Dr.Ambedkar insisted that Panchayati Raj have reservations for the poor. Panchayat reservations for women from all of the following groups were established by Rajiv Gandhi to ensure this. His stated purpose was to provide 'Power to the People' to the Panchayats, making India the world's largest democracy and the most representative democracy.

The Panchayati Raj idea, which has strong roots in rural India's history and culture, is not new. The Panini, Buddhist, and Rig Vedic canonical writings are among the ancient texts that show the emergence of "Panchayat Raj" and its emphasis on administrative autonomy. According to the scripture, rural areas are referred to as 'Gram Sanghs.' The officials of the Village Republic are mentioned in the Manusmiriti, Mahabharat, and Arthshastra. During the Mauryan, Gupta, and Sultanate periods, panchayats were established as local administrations, serving as a method of delivering justice,



education, and hygiene, among other things. Madras was the first municipal corporation in India to establish British local self-government.

73rd Amendment Act, the Panchayati Raj is being reformed to better serve the people. Panchayats were standardised as a result of this transformation in structure and makeup, authority and responsibility. It helped Panchayati Raj efforts to foster social and economic progress while also increasing rural India's quality of life. It is critical that people of colour and women receive a specified percentage of seats in all Panchayats. SCs and STs would be given preference in all panchayat chairperson positions in proportion to vacancies. Women will hold One-third of all panchayat chair positions.

Review of Literature

According to S.N. Chaudhary (2004), owing to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment's reservation, there are thousands of Dalit and tribal leaders in panchayats at all three levels. Some of them have accomplished great things. However, many of them are first-generation politicians from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and lack the conceptual capacity to understand their rights and responsibilities. As a result, many rely on others, including the Panchayat Secretary, to make decisions and take action.

According to Sunita Dhatea (2005), Increased participation of women in local government through constitutional amendments will not solve all problems; rather, the movement to increase women's participation in PRIs through constitutional amendments must be supported by an effort to change attitudes in our society, bureaucracy, and state legislators. As part of the process of helping elected officials strengthen their capacity to serve on panchayats, an education campaign aimed at women, specifically SC women, is also required.

According to C. Ram Reddy et al., (2009) the method of training women leaders from backward castes is identical to that of men. Even among backward caste women leaders, the processes of rural leadership deriving from caste and family status are often in place. Given that the bulk of the women come from families with a long history of political participation, it's safe to presume they've been appropriately socialised. Except for women in positions of authority, women from backward castes have significant empowerment.

According to Yatindra Singh Sisodia (2011), even though people are aware of the inherent advantages of the gram swaraj model, attendance at gram sabha sessions has been poor. There is a low



level of engagement in large part because of the deeply ingrained caste system and class and gender disparities. The sarpanch and other influential figures have a disproportionate influence on decision-making. The majority of the state's panchayats are effectively led by two opposing groups: the traditional influential representatives and novices and fresh arrivals. Both factions are prominent and highly contrasted.

This study established its goals and sought to fill in the gaps by researching available elements of women's empowerment through Panchayati raj in Bihar. In this study, women's impact on rural social structure was primarily explored in terms of dominance, interaction, socio-economic, and political participation. Second, intra and intra-interaction pattern and behaviour of women and men in society, and finally, women's decision-making in and out of the home and number of women who benefit from government initiatives.

Objectives

- ❖ To identify the major socio-political parameters; e.g. literacy, marriage, religion, superstitions, family planning; and political awareness, involvement-participation, and to assess the degree and nature of women empowerment.
- ❖ To analyse emerging rural socio-economic and political sub-structures.

Hypothesis

- There is positive relationship between rates of voting, exposure to modern values and sense of self-identity among women.
- There is co-relation between change in socio-economic status of women and emerging political system.

Research Methodology

Universe of the Study

The study was carried out in the district of Patna. Universe for the study is as follows:

1. Women headed panchayats representative of selected Gram Panchayats.
2. Non-representative women of the selected Panchayats.



After the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and the Bihar Panchayati Raj Act of 2006, Bihar was one of the first states to implement Panchayati Raj System and to provide 50 percent reservation for women at all three levels of panchayat. After 2006, a significant number of women in Bihar entered local politics.

Patna is the capital of Bihar. Furthermore, the district has an unbalanced gender ratio and low female literacy rates. This is particularly concerning because the district has the financial resources to encourage women's education. Women in rural areas endure discrimination due to a patriarchal culture that undermines their economic contribution even as manual labour.

Sampling unit

The sample unit for the study is

1. Representative Women, and
2. Non-representative women

Sampling Size and Method of Sampling

Patna district has been purposefully selected to analyse the impact of Panchayati Raj on empowerment of rural women within this development scenario. For comparative analysis two block has been selected- one developed block in terms of development indicators and another under-developed in above terms has been as follow:-

- (i) **Selection of Blocks:** In the first stage, two blocks of Patna district has been selected- one developed block (Fatuha) in terms of infrastructure and economic indicators, and one under-developed block (Belchhi) in the above terms, keeping causal comparative factors of the research design in mind.
- (ii) **Selection of Panchayats:** In the second stage, two panchayats from each block has been selected, where women panchayat representative and in terms of developed and under-developed indicator. Thus four panchayats namely Belchhi and Fatehpur in Belchhi block and Jethuli and Pitambarpur in Fatuha block have been selected.
- (iii) **Selection of Respondents:** In the third stage, following purposive sampling method, 10 Women Representative (Mukhiya, Ward Sadasya, Sarpanch and Panch) and through simple random sampling method 40 Non-representative Women has been selected from each Panchayats. Thus the sample size of this study has been 200 household.



Tools

- Semi-structured interview schedule (village schedule, Non- Representative women schedule, Representative women schedule).
- Observation and Focused Group Discussion

Sources of Data

- Primary data: collected data from field (Panchayats: Belchhi, Fatehpur, Jethuli and Pitambarpur).
- Secondary sources: Panchayat records, voter list, documents, literature, various governmental and NGOs reports, etc.

Analysis

The collected data/information is analysed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS software. Simple statistical methods such as 'averages' and 'percentages' are used to analyse the data.

Relevance of the Study

A watershed moment in local self-government history was marked by the 73rd Amendment Act. Local self-government institutions benefited greatly from the 73rd Amendment Act. Bihar became the first state in India to provide women equal representation in three-tier panchayats in 2006. It simultaneously strengthened women's political, social, and economic empowerment. In addition, 50 percent of the chairman and deputy chairman positions are allocated for women to achieve gender parity in municipal governance. As a result, they will feel more empowered and will be more valuable as decision making partners.

Result and Findings

The study's findings indicate that representative women view politics as a way to increase their influence and status in Panchayats. Since no development work could be done without political power, women's representatives were seen as one of the best ways to serve the people. On the other hand, it is impossible for a housewife to fulfill social obligations. As a result, 46 percent of respondents said they wanted to know about government initiatives. It's interesting to note that while 22 percent of female representatives are uninterested in politics, 55 percent of female representatives now self-connected in their respective areas. They aspire to participate in top levels of decision-making bodies in order to improve the quality of life for women in general and for themselves specifically. Comparing



representative women to non-representative women, it appears that the representative women have higher political aspirations to be in public life.

It is extremely concerning that there is still discrimination against women in the study area. In both the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, they do not receive equal pay for the work that men do. Male dominance historically has been predominant in rural areas, now a significant change has occurred. 27 percent respondents reported that they receive daily wage payment equal to male, in which there are 30 percent representative women and 26.25 percent non-representative women. This trend has an impact on the study area's traditional dominance of rural structure. But in some works, they have started getting wages equal to men. This change marks a positive change towards women in their socio-economic status. However, they have begun to receive pay parity with men at some jobs. This modification signifies a rise in the socio-economic status of women. Moreover, the expansion of bank facilities into rural areas has encouraged women to save. They are aware of the importance of saving money (power) for important family needs. The majority of respondents were found to have either self-opened bank accounts or bank accounts opened through government initiatives. Most of the respondents are familiar with banking services and feel at ease making self-deposits and withdrawals. This is evidence of empowerment of women in the research area.

It has been found from the study that, 55 percent representative women and 61.9 percent non-representative women come from nuclear family, while 45 percent representative women and 38.1 percent non-representative women come from joint family. Respondents said that a joint family is difficult to take part in the Panchayats activities. There are reasons for the same, e.g., lots of domestic work, responsibilities, traditional and established norms. But now in nuclear families they have less domestic responsibilities and women can come out easily from traditional roles and perform public responsibilities.

Respondents' political awareness was assessed, and it was found that 91 percent of respondents were aware of voting age and tenure of Gram Panchayats. It is a necessary condition for gender equality and genuine democracy. This facilitates women's direct participation in public decision-making processes. Analyzing political awareness and women's participation, it was found that 72 percent of respondents are aware of the present Panchayat women reserved seats. Low level of awareness observed about conducting election and election fee of Gram Panchayats. Regarding the gain from being representative and non-representative women in their Panchayats, women have raised awareness and confidence level. This is important gain for 58.5 percent of respondents. The first experience of attending Gram-Sabha



meeting was not a comfortable experience for many of them, but now they regularly attend Gram-Sabha meeting. They felt more confident by their presence.

In the study area knowledge about the rules of Panchayati Raj was very low among people. They were not aware of panchayat election fee and conducting gram panchayat election. This could be due to their illiteracy and patriarchal setup in our society. Whereas, information about Panchayati Raj could be helpful in their political empowerment. Moreover, many of the representative and non-representative women were getting benefits of different government schemes and their problems have been solved by representative women in PRIs. In majority of the cases, it was also observed that being in a political position; women's representatives get respect from people and the behaviour of government employees towards them also changes. They are also participating in Gram-Sabha decisions. It's a symbol of Panchayati Raj's role in women's empowerment.

In terms of dependency of women on other family members, it has been observed that they are now becoming self-reliant and they individually going to government offices or going with village lady and face government officials, discuss public issues, government schemes, and village development. This shows they are not dependent on male member and their self-confidence improved significantly. It was also observed during field study that now they are comfortable with more modern activities. It may be concluded that majority of women meet with government officers to discuss public issues, government schemes, and village development. These changes have impact on their social, economic, and politically status.

The trend shows that majority of women frequently and properly converse with government officers in Block office. Study reveals that in their Panchayats male representatives by and large support the cause of women getting politically empowered. A majority of the male respondents spoke positive things about the women representatives.

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