

## Study on the Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Bihar

Renu Kumari<sup>1</sup> and Siya Ram Singh<sup>2</sup>

1. Instructor, Department of Home Science Extension & Communication management, College of Home Science, RAU, Pusa, Samastipur, Bihar, 2. Assoc. Prof., Extension Education, B.A.U. Sabour (Bhagalpur)

Corresponding author e-mail: renurai44@yahoo.co.in

### ABSTRACT

*The present study was an effort to know the extent of participation of women elected members in Panchayati Raj institutions. Total fifty women representatives randomly selected from all the Panchayats of Pusa Block of Samastipur district of Bihar. The tool used for collecting information was an interview schedule. The findings revealed that majority of women had low participation in functioning of Gram Panchayat & forty five out of fifty respondents were punctual in attending meetings. In order to determine the conditions governing the participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and the influence of various factors over this, the data were subjected to coefficient of correlation, multiple regression and path analysis. The results of correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis clearly indicated that the participation by women representative was positively and significantly correlated only with caste ( $r=0.3884$ ,  $p>0.01$ ) & 't' value of social linkage was negative but significant at 1 per cent level of probability ( $t= -3.73$ )*

**Key Words:** Participation; PRIs (Panchayati raj institutions);

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act was a significant step towards opening up the space for women's political participation and in acknowledging their role in the development of their villages. For the first time, in the history of this country, one million women were elected to various tiers of Panchayats. Women who have been elected to power in Panchayati Raj Institutions represents various backgrounds – rich and poor, dominant classes and oppressed social classes, educated and illiterate (PRIA, 2003). Devaki Jain (1994) in her analysis of the 73rd constitutional amendment writes that the main intention of the policy makers behind this reservation is two-fold one is the democratic justice and second is resource utilization (human). She further states that as the half of the population are women. The country development cannot achieve without the proper participation of woman.

After the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, Government of Bihar enacted the Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 (Replaced by Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, 2006) and a three tier system of Panchayat Raj (Zila Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayats) started functioning after general election in April/ May

2001. There are 38 Zila Parishads (ZPs), 531 Panchayat Samitis (PSs) and 8471 Gram Panchayats (GPs) in the State of Bihar covering a rural population of about 7,43,21,103. At the state level the Panchayat Raj Department coordinates the functioning of the PRIs. It is being said that with the advent of women in such a large number in the primary institutions i.e., Gram Panchayats, a new phase of the process of empowerment of women has been unveiled. Therefore, it is both interesting and significant to study the role and extent of participation of the elected women panchayat members in Bihar's rural local self government, factors which drove them to come out of their homes and make their path through the local politics to reach to the Gram Panchayat as its Mukhia or Sarpanch or a ward member and which are likely to influence their future public role and extent of empowerment. The specific objectives of the present study are :

1. To assess the nature and degree of participation of women in panchayati raj institutions.
2. To find out magnitude of participation by women members.

- To find out the guiding factors in participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institution.

### METHODOLOGY

The present study was undertaken in Pusa Block of Samstipur District of Bihar State. A total of fifty women representatives were randomly selected from all the Gram Panchayats of this Block. A pretested semi structured interview schedule was used to collect the data by personal interview method. In order to determine the conditions governing the participation of women; the data were subjected to multiple correlation, regression and path analysis. Participation was taken as dependent variable and assessed through following methods.

*Participation in PRIs :* The participation of women was defined in terms two measures: (1) symbolic and substantive participation (2) role played in panchayat deliberations. The symbolic participation was studied by taking into consideration presence and punctuality in the panchayat meetings. For measuring substantive participation, five measures were taken into account - Selection of a project, planning for execution of the project, selection of agents/workers to carry out the project, fund allotment and distribution for undertaking the work and initiation of the work

The extent of participation of women members in the above activities of Gram Panchyats was measured both in terms of participation score and degree of participation expressed in terms of percentage. The participation scores of each respondent were computed on a four point continuum. Against the five areas the degree of participation in decision making was measured of scores of 1, 2, 3 and 4 were assigned to 0-25 per cent, 25-50 per cent, 50-75 per cent and more than 75 per cent participation respectively. Further, the participation index of each respondent was calculated against each activity with the help of a formula as under

$$PI = \frac{\text{Scores Obtained}}{\text{Maximum Possible Scores}} \times 100$$

*PI=Participation intensity*

Based on the mean and standard deviation of mean scores obtained, the respondents were classified into three categories viz.

- High [Above (Mean + S.D.)],
- Medium [(Mean + S.D.) to (Mean - S.D.)] and
- Low [Below (Mean - S.D.)]

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted with the aim to study the participation of women in Panchyati Raj Institutions. The information was elicited as per the objectives of the study.

**Table 1. Symbolic and substantive participation of present women members in PRIs (Multiple response) (N=50)**

S. No.	Participation	No.	%
1.	Punctual in attending meeting	45	90
2.	Present in meeting	40	80
3.	Number of women who spoke during meeting	24	48
4.	Number of women making prior preparation during meeting	23	46
5.	Number of women executing votes during meeting	9	18

*Symbolic & Substantive Participation :* It is generally believed that the family responsibilities, social traditions and domestic duties and above all lack of education and poor understanding of the processes and functions of panchayats act as strong impediments to women's participation in panchayati raj meetings. In cases when women ensure their physical presence, they do not effectively participate in deliberations and decision making. Data concerning physical or symbolic as well as substantive participation of women members are given in Table 1. As is evident, 45 out of 50 respondents were punctual in attending meetings and 40 out of 50 women remain present during the meetings throughout its deliberations. Clearly the provision of reservations for women has contributed greatly in increasing presence in panchayat meetings. This is in contrast to the observation of many regarding poor attendance of women members or their representation by their husbands or male family members.

*Extent of Participation :* Speaking is closely related with the participation in panchayat deliberations centered on developmental issues. To probe into this aspect, five areas were identified to find out respondent's involvement: preparing village development plans, preparing panchayat budget, organizing community programmes, mobilizing resources, identifying beneficiaries and listing people below the poverty line. The extent of participation of women representatives in decision making for approval of developmental projects of their Gram Panchyat have been organized in Table 2.

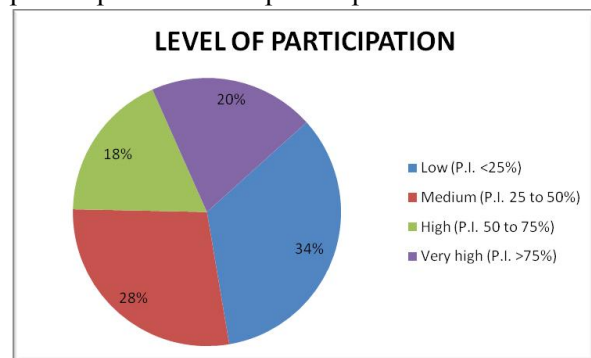
**Table 2. Extent of participation of women members in Gram Panchayat**

S. No.	Activities	Extent of Participation N=50			
		<25%	25-50%	50-75%	>75
1.	Preparing development plans	8 (16.0)	8 (16.0)	10 (20.0)	24 (48.0)
2.	Preparing panchayat budget,	9 (18.0)	15 (30.0)	14 (28.0)	12 (24.0)
3.	Organizing community programmes	21 (42.0)	13 (26.0)	09 (18.0)	07 (14.0)
4.	Mobilizing resources	27 (54.0)	15 (30.0)	03 (6.0)	05 (10.0)
5.	Identifying beneficiaries	17 (34.0)	19 (38.0)	09 (18.0)	05 (10.0)

It is evident from Table 2 that the maximum participation of women members is in respect of preparing village development plans. There were (48.0%) members respondents who were reported to participate and play effective roles in preparing village development plans. Their magnitude of participation was more than 75 per cent. Further 20.0 and 16.0 per cent members were found to participate in this activity to the extent of 50.0 to 75.0 per cent and 25.0 to 50.0 percent respectively. Thus, the rest 16.0 percent members had the lowest degree of participation i.e. less than 25.0 per cent. Thus, it is revealed that the women

members were not finding it convenient to participate fully in various roles of Gram Panchayat. *Singh (2001)* also report that Panchyat organization lack aadequate participation magnitude of participation and involvement of all section of rural society in its functioning.

On the basis of the participation scores obtained by the respondents, participation index was calculated with the help of formula described in methodology. The observations thus obtained are presented in Fig 1. It is indicated that 34.0 per cent women members subsequently had low level of participation. There were 28.0 per cent members who have medium level of participation. The participation index score of



18.0 per cent members were between 50.0 to 75.0 per cent and that of the rest 20.0 per cent members above 75.0 per cent.

*Guiding factors in participation* : In order to determine the conditions governing the participation of women, the data were subjected to multiple correlation, regression and path analysis.

**Table 3. Correlation and multiple regressions between participation and socio-economic and psychological variables of women members of Gram Panchyats**

S.No.	Characters	Correlation coefficient	Standard regression	Standard error	t-value	SDR regression coefficient
1	Age	-0.1500	-0.2352	0.10147	-2.32*	-0.33060
2	Caste	0.3884**	3.6303	1.63030	2.23*	0.44163
3	Education	-0.0966	0.0833	1.51108	-0.06	-0.01271
4	Family Education	0.0255	1.5135	1.39950	1.08	0.25189
5	Family Status	0.2149	2.2557	1.06445	2.12*	0.35163
6	Size of land holding	0.0864	0.5918	1.44861	0.41	0.08738
7	Family Income	-0.0146	-1.2493	1.45891	-0.86	0.19274
8	Material possession	-0.0018	-0.5180	0.4406	-1.18	0.22359
9	House type	0.1388	1.7495	1.41141	1.24	0.18598
10.	Social linkage	-0.3911**	6.4260	1.75504	3.73**	-0.52990
11.	Knowledge	-0.1668	-0.1167	0.09726	-1.20	-0.16281
12.	Development orientation	0.0714	0.1486	0.20161	0.12	0.01508
13.	Development constraints	-0.1697	-0.1317	0.15384	-0.86	-0.11567

\*\* Significant at 1% level of probability

*Relationship of participation by women representatives with socio-economic and psychological variables* : The results of the multiple correlation and multiple regression analysis between participation and socio-economic and psychological variables of women members are presented in Table 3. It is revealed that participation by women representative was positively and significantly correlated only with caste ( $r=0.3884$ ,  $p>0.01$ ). The association of participation with caste was positive and significant at 1 per cent level of probability. The association between participation and social linkage was also significant at 1 per cent level of probability but it was negative ( $r=-0.3911$ ,  $p>0.01$ ). The variables like family status ( $r=0.2149$ ), house type ( $r=0.1388$ ), land holding ( $r=0.0864$ ) and family education ( $r=0.0255$ ) were also positively correlated with participation of women in panchayat activities but were not significant at either of the two levels of probability. The rest of the variables i.e. age, knowledge, development orientation, performance constraints, respondent education, family income and material possession were in negative association with participation of women representatives. This indicates that the participation of women representative in the development activities is influenced maximum by the caste factor.

Some of coefficients of correlation which are high but missed the level of significance are family type ( $r=0.2149$ ), house type ( $r=0.1388$ ), development constraints ( $r=-0.1697$ ), knowledge ( $r=0.1668$ ) and age ( $r=-0.1500$ ). This clearly indicated that the family status

i.e., the members belonging to larger families were more emboldened to participate in the developmental programmes of Gram Panchyats. The house type also played positively towards participation of Gram Panchyats. The house type also played positively towards participation, although in a feeble manner. This is possibly for the reason that a type of house did indicate the socio-economic status of a person which had been found to influence an increase in social participation. However, a negative correlation of participation with that of knowledge is discouraging but the weak degree of relationship is solace. An in depth investigation into this inverse relationship revealed that several members having education above graduation level were in fact participating passively in the developmental programme of Gram Panchyats. On a close look the reason of this kind of behavior by some of the highly educated members was simple that the woman representatives having high qualification belonging to higher socio-economic status avoided the proceeding of Gram Panchayat.

The multiple regression analysis to estimate the contribution of independent variables to the participation of women representatives in the Gram Panchayat as presented in Table 3 indicated that the partial regression coefficients are significant in case of four variables only. The  $t'$  value of social linkage was negative but significant at 1 per cent level of probability ( $t=-3.73$ ) whereas the  $t'$  value of age was also negative but significant at 5 per cent level of probability ( $t=-2.32$ ). On the other hand,  $t'$  value of caste ( $t=2.23$ ) and family

**Table 4. Direct, indirect effect of independent variables on participation of women members of Gram Panchyats.**

S.No.	Characteristics	Direct effect	Total in direct effect	Maximum indirect effect	Through
1	Age	-0.3306	-0.1504	0.1749	Caste
2	Caste	0.4416	0.301	-0.1308	Age
3.	Education	-0.127	-0.0908	-0.2126	Social linkage
4.	Family Education	0.2519	0.1276	-0.2162	Social linkage
5.	Family status	0.3516	-0.2845	0.1060	Caste
6.	Size of land holding	0.0874	-0.0009	0.2569	Caste
7.	Family Income	-0.1927	0.1783	-0.1202	Age
8.	Material possession	-0.2236	0.2155	0.1636	Caste
9	House type	0.1860	0.7044	0.1895	Caste
10.	Social linkage	-0.5299	0.1327	0.1028	F.E.S.
11.	Knowledge	-0.1628	0.0040	-0.0562	F.E.S.
12	Development orientation	-0.0151	-0.0563	0.0876	Caste
13.	Development constraints	-0.1157	-0.0546	0.0933	Family status

\* Significant at 5% level of probability

status ( $t=2.12$ ) were positive and significant at 5 per cent level probability. In terms of standardized regression coefficient social linkage, caste, family status and age, a unit gain is capable of effecting a change in participation to the tune of 6.43, 3.63, 2.26 and 0.23 units, respectively provided other variables were kept constant.

It is revealed in Table 4 that the direct effect of social linkage (-0.5299), caste (0.4416), family status (0.3516), age (-0.3306), family education (0.2519) and material possession (0.2236) over extent of participation of the women members in Gram Panchayat were substantial. The house type had only a modest direct effect (0.1860) but interestingly had maximum indirect effect (0.7044). Substantial indirect effects were exerted on participation also by caste (0.301), family status (0.2845) and material possession (0.2155). Caste, social linkage and age were the variable through which the majority of the independent ones extended their effect through over the participation in Gram Panchayats by the women representatives. The result of path analysis supported the contention advanced earlier that the intensity of participation by a member in the proceedings

of Gram Panchayat depends on her availability solely for this institution. A divided attention due to additional membership to other organization worked negatively towards their participation in Gram Panchayats. Further, caste and family status as usual played key role in participation of the women members.

#### CONCLUSION

In Indian Constitution, there are provisions for equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their social and economic status. Despite the fact that women's effective participation in the PRI institutions leaves much to be desired and also recognizing that women representatives are mostly either subservient to the militantly dominant male class or at best dummy surrogates planted to serve the vested interests of their masters, to conclude that women's reservation in the PRI (and the subsequent enhanced political participation of women) has not made a mark in terms of improving the grim scenario faced by women in general and poor and low caste women in particular, would be an exercise in fallacy.

*Paper received on* : February 18, 2011

*Received after revision* : February 07, 2012

*Accepted on* : March 14, 2012

#### REFERENCES

1. PRIA (2003). Women leaders in Panchayat: PRIA publisher. <http://www.pria.org>
2. Jain, Devaki (1994), Women: New vision of leadership: a presentation at global forum, Dublin, July 9-1
3. Singh, S.P. (2001). Management of people by Gram Panchayats for Rural Development. *J. Rural Development*, 20(2): 219-252
4. Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, (2006).

\*\*\*\*\*