

Compendium

*Participation of Women in
Local Governance Processes*



DISCLAIMER

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Participation of Women in Local Governance Processes - A Compendium

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Development Alternatives
New Delhi

Abbreviations

AES	Adult Education Scheme
AIR	All India Radio
ANANDI	Area Networking and Development Initiative
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
AWARD	Action for Women and Rural Development
B.Ed	Bachelor of Education
BDO	Block Development Officer
CC	Cement Concrete
CRR	Community Radio Reporter
CRS	Community Radio Station
DA	Development Alternatives
FTII	Film and Television Institute of India
GP	Gram Panchayat
GS	Gram Sabha
JMS	Jagrit Mahila Sangathan
JSA	Jalyukt Shivar Abhiyan
LS	Lok Sabha
MM	Mahila Mandals
MNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MoPR	Ministry of Panchayati Raj
NGF	New Green Field
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OBC	Other Backward Classes
ODF	Open Defecation Free
PAG	Project Advisory Group
PMAY	Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institution
PRIA	Participatory Research in Asia
PS	Panchayat Samiti
RSCD	Research and Support Centre for Development
RWH	Rain Water Harvesting
SBSKS	Sewa Bhaskar Samaj Kalyan Sansthan
SC	Scheduled Caste
SC	Supreme Court
SDM	Sub-Divisional Magistrate
SHG	Self Help Group
SHO	Station House Officer
SRRI	Social and Rural Research Institute
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
SSS	Stree Shakti Sangathan
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TDO	Taluka Development Officer
VS	Vidhan Sabha
WIFPR	Western India Forum for Panchayati Raj
YSS	Yuva Shakti Sangathan
ZP	Zila Panchayat



Glossary

Chaudharahat	:	Used for men in Haryana who exhibit power
Dalits	:	Socially disadvantaged section of the Indian society
Ghoongat	:	A cultural practice where married women put a veil over their head to cover their face. This is done as a way to pay respect to in-laws and elders. Also referred to as Parda Pratha
Gram Panchayat	:	The lowest tier of the local self governments in India
Jachak Vasti	:	A lower caste colony. This expression is mostly used in Maharashtra
Khap	:	A Khap is a community organisation representing a clan or a group of related clans
Panch	:	Members of the Panchayat
Sarpanch	:	Main head of the Panchayat
Sarpanch Pati	:	A practice prevalent in villages, where Sarpanch Pati are those men whose wives are Sarpanch, but who believe themselves to be the Sarpanch, and thus take all decisions in place of their wife. Also known as Pati Sarpanch and Pradhan Pati in several regions



Introduction

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, mandating 33 per cent reservation for women in Panchayats, was one of the most important judgements for women's participation in local governance. The 33 per cent reservation in Panchayat bodies has given opportunities to women, Dalits and younger persons to participate in politics and governance. Over the years, 20 states have amended their State Panchayati Raj Act to increase the reservation of seats from 33 per cent to 50 per cent in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Some state specific legislations and policies have been found to impede the participation of women in local governance. For example, the amendments made to the Haryana Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, debar thousands of women, Dalits (a backward caste) and general candidates across the state from contesting Panchayat elections. The amended law sets out minimum educational qualifications for candidates, resulting in the exclusion of more than half of the rural population from candidature in the Panchayats. The amendments made by the state government were further upheld by the Supreme Court (SC) of India. The SC, in its judgement, proclaimed, "Those who have no formal education, those who have no 'functioning toilet' and those who are in rural indebtedness cannot contest an election for the position of Sarpanch."

Similarly, the state of **Rajasthan has also promulgated laws, that a contestant should have the minimum qualification of secondary education (Class 10) from the state board or any approved institution/board as an eligibility requirement to contest Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti elections.** Rajasthan also has a two-child norm – a person, male or female, who has more than two children, cannot contest Panchayat and Municipal elections and also cannot apply for any government jobs. In 2005, former Chief Secretary, Madhya Pradesh, Ms. Nirmala Buch, had done a study on the implications and consequences of the two-child norm in Panchayats. According to this study, this rule does not understand the social status and challenges of women, due to which women are particularly affected from this rule.

This study intends to build an understanding and knowledge on the impact of these laws and policies on women participation in the local governance, by secondary and primary research. This initiative has been designed to use community media processes to gather evidence, regional media and online platforms to create a visibility of the emerging concerns and issues, in order to inform relevant policies. The expected outcome of this study is to work towards processes to engage media and public through media advocacy, which can help to create greater visibility and promote more participation of women in governance.



The study has documented and developed case stories bringing forth the barriers women face, and the social change that women in governance (especially those from the vulnerable sections of society) had demonstrated in six states of India. Efforts were also made to disseminate the same through newspaper articles/media platforms. This project aims to bring about the impact of these policies and legislations on the lives of women who are Elected Women Representatives (EWRs).

The study was conducted in Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka with the help of Community Radios (NGF Palwal, Manav Rachna, Alfaz-e-Mewat, Radio Neotech, Hamar Radio, Radio Madhuban, Jhunjunu Radio, Radio Active, Krishi Vanilli Radio, Nammura Bhanuli Radio Station, Radio FTII, Green CRS, Vasundha Vakraishi Vahini Radio, Yeralavani Radio, Radio Manndeshi, Sharada Krushi Radio, Vidyavani, Rudi No Radio, and Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel Radio).

The project is designed to provide data for mapping of policies and legislations that impede or promote participation of women in gender responsive governance. The selected legislations and policies for this study have mainly focused on governance, social and economic systems and processes. The information gathered from this study has been further used to develop a strategy for engagement with media. This report not only presents the status of women in Panchayat participation, but also captures the ongoing dynamics and scenario in which this impact occurs.

Most of the stories presented here in the Compendium highlight the fact that the new rules (policies) have demotivated and adversely impacted the participation of marginalised women in the Panchayati Raj Elections, whereas some of the stories also bring out the positive views of young educated women regarding this new set of rules. This study has given a good opportunity to the Development Alternatives team to understand the dynamics of gender, class and caste politics, and the almost passive role of media in providing coverage to these issues and concerns. This one-year project has brought a set of stakeholders on one platform to work in synergy and develop an understanding of the complex and deeper aspects pertaining to women in Panchayati Raj. We hope this report will be seen in the spirit of strengthening Panchayati Raj in the coming days, and increasing participation of women in the PRI system, which in present context needs attention.

Methodology

A set of 36 community radio stations was identified from six states, by the Development Alternatives (DA) Group, for training and capacity building around issues of women participation in local governance. Out of the list of 36 community radio stations, one community radio station (per state) with maximum outreach and resources was selected as the nodal agency to coordinate the activities with other partner radio stations in the state.



For collecting the stories and for sharing state specific information related to the PRI Act, norms and policies, a two-day training was organised in all the study states. State specific training modules were developed, and training was imparted in collaboration with the nodal agencies in all the six states.

Through these trainings, the CR reporters (CRRs) were trained on the use of FGDs followed by in-depth interviews to substantiate the stories. The project team had examined the story ideas generated by CRRs, and had worked with them to identify the themes under which the stories would be relevant. Local vernacular media was invited to the training workshops with an objective to get the “story hooks” introduced among CRRs and local media. This was done with the aim of making people aware on the issues picked by the media. This also enabled possibilities of exploring partnership opportunities with the local vernacular media.

After the story identification and sharing of case study collection format, a month’s time was given to the partners to collect stories from the ground in their regional languages. A total of 76 stories were received from the field, out of which 30 were finally selected to be detailed out through further field visits. The criteria of selection were as follows:

1. Stories of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) and women affected by the norms
2. Data availability
3. Willingness of women leaders to participate

The next level of work involved finalisation of the stories by filling the gaps in information/data flowing in from the field. For this, discussions were facilitated with the target group, partners and relevant stakeholders, by the DA team members.

Once the stories were finalised, they were given for translation into English. These 30 case stories from six different states were then compiled as a compendium to give a picture of women’s participation in PRIs, their challenges and coping mechanisms, and specific efforts were made to understand women’s participation vis-a-vis emerging government norms.





Challenges and Learning

Under the “Advocating for Change: Promoting Women's Participation and Leadership in Local Governance” project, the team has faced various challenges on the field. Establishing partnerships with community radios as nodal agencies in various states was the first challenge. As design, the team had decided to get one Radio Station as the nodal agency, and the rest would be the partners to this nodal agency. Many of the identified Community Radio Stations (CRs) could not become nodal agencies, mainly due to the following factors: they were not ready to meet our timelines, for some the amount (fund) was not sufficient, and for some this issue was not of much interest. Some of them had capacity problems and were not ready to take the responsibility of the nodal agency, which includes conducting workshops, compiling stories, getting them disseminated, and so on. Most of the nodal partners mentioned that the time being allotted was quite less for the level of deliverables.

This problem got resolved later, when the team contacted other CRs and oriented them on becoming nodal agencies. Through this, the team learned that the terms and conditions need to be spelled out very clearly and settled beforehand, and that the initial recce should contain home-work on all these aspects.

The second major challenge was to take on board the local media persons during the training and orientation workshop. The aim was to orient them on the issues and concerns of EWRs, and the impact of the ecosystem on their participation. In this process, it became evident that most of the media persons were not taking this seriously. The reasons shared directly and indirectly brought forward the point that they were not interested in this theme, and were not seeing this as marketable beat.

Another challenge faced by the team during the orientation cum training workshops was the reluctance of participants, including Community Radio Reporters, to understand the impact of the state policies on EWRs in the ‘broader perspective’. According to them, minimum education criteria, the two child norm and other such norms are good for the village as they convey positive messages to people at large, and are also positive from the angle of women empowerment. During the workshop, the project team felt that the media persons, who otherwise should be unbiased, were also (may be knowingly or unknowingly) impacted by the patriarchal mindset, and were unable to see the issue from a broader dimension.

This gave the team the learning that in projects where such mindset related problems can be encountered, the design itself has to take this into consideration. It also helped the team to realise that besides media and CRRs, it would have been good to take those stakeholders on board who have already been working on this cause (of breaking or attacking prevailing



mindsets and working for women empowerment), like local NGOs and research organisations. The option of involving women impacted by such patriarchal mindsets and norms could also be explored.

After all the workshops were done, the community radio partners were supposed to send the stories within a time period of one and a half month, but this did not happen. So the visits were made by the project team to cover the stories with the help of CRRs. **The team faced major problems in Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat, as there were language issues.** To fill this gap, the team had to coordinate with local radio partners and depend on them again, due to which a lot of time got wasted and meeting deadlines was not possible. In case of Chhattisgarh, the team faced problems as the community radio partner had infrastructure and manpower related challenges, and so without the radio partner or any other local support, the team was handicapped. In this situation, help was taken from a local journalist to develop stories.

This gave the team the learning that depending on only one type of stakeholder may lead to problems, and so it is always good to develop partnerships with different types of stakeholders (especially in new states where language and culture can become a problem). For example, in this case, had NGOs, research and academic institutes also been taken into loop, the problem could have been resolved at an early stage.

Across the six states, the team faced issues in talking to women because they were not opening up, especially in Haryana (Mewat area). Mewat has 80 per cent Muslim population, where men do not allow women to talk to unknown persons or other men. Though the team eventually managed, this brought with it the learning that such projects also need community mobilisation from a very early stage of the project. This would help in the mobilisation of women PRIs, and the community members would understand the importance of these project processes.

The last, but not the least, challenge was related to the media coverage of the case stories. When the team members went to the six states to fill the gaps in the case stories, they also had meetings to build relationships with local newspapers. At that time, most of the media persons said that they can take up and publish these types of stories; but once the case stories were developed, their response was cold. They did not seem to be interested in publishing stories about the work of EWRs and their plight. National media and English media have shown greater apathy towards publishing such stories.

The write-ups were published, and most of the times, it was through personal contacts. The learning was that at times, it is better to understand from others' perspective, as to why they would do a particular thing. For example, we all are aware that media normally does not cover such stories that do not have 'sensational' aspects. The media engagement strategy throws some light on these aspects.

Overview of the Norms of the Six States

In Haryana, the maximum stories showed how women were impacted by the education norm. These were the women who were doing good work and were getting appreciated, but could not contest in elections, as they were not fulfilling the norms. However, in one of every five stories, a case is observed where a woman benefitted from the education norms. What emerges clearly from the stories is that the implementation of the minimum education law in all six project-states has led to a decrease in the participation of rural women in Panchayat elections.

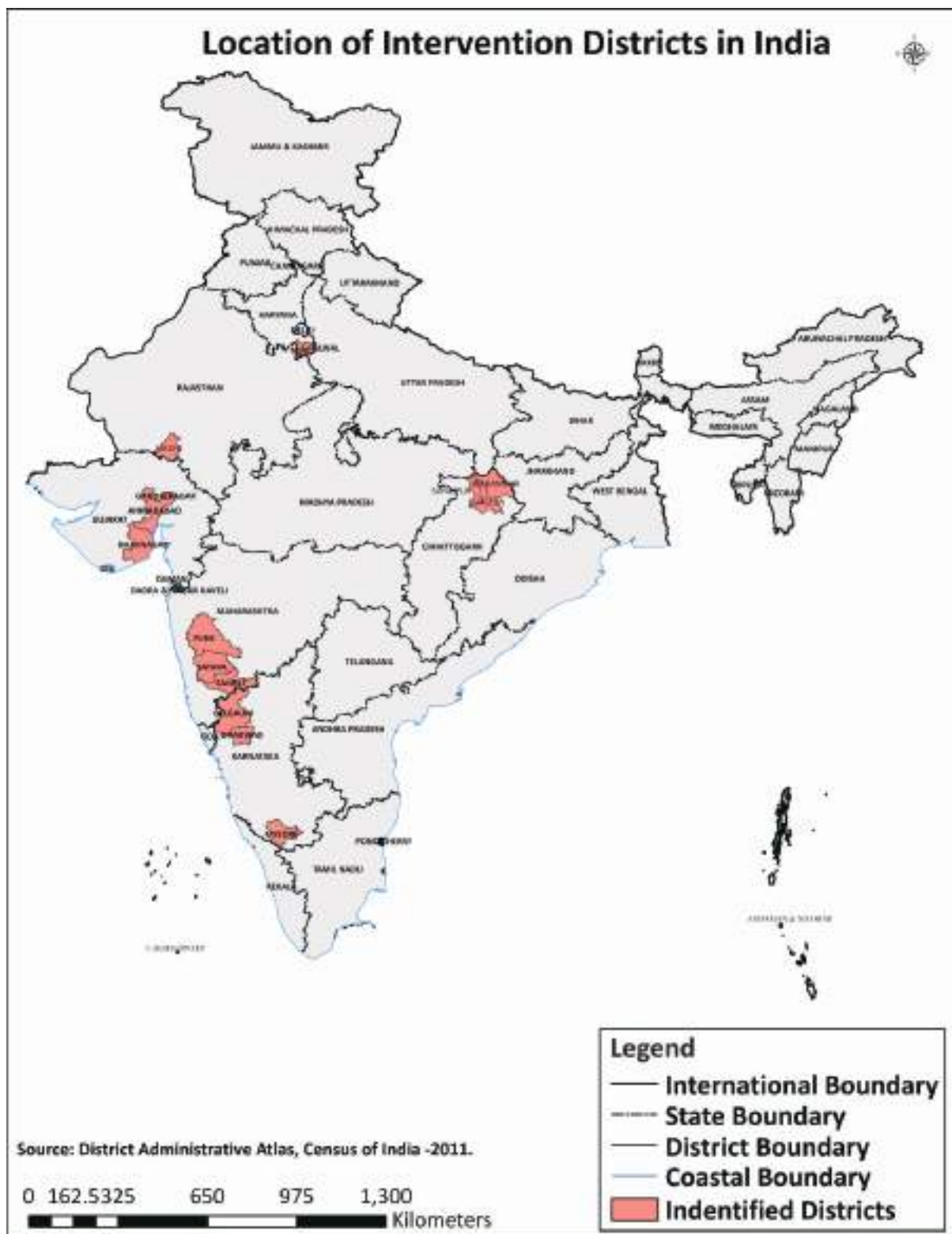
After the education norm, the second norm that has impacted women the most (as evident in these stories) is the two-child norm. The norm of having two children reveals the dichotomy that exists at higher policy-making levels where this measure is seen as conducive and exemplary in view of the need to raise small families, while at grassroots levels, the perception is widespread that the norm is coercive in its impact. Rajasthan introduced this norm for Panchayats and municipalities in 1992, Andhra Pradesh and Haryana introduced it in 1993, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh adopted it in 2000, and Maharashtra in 2003 with retrospective effect from 2002. The state of Chhattisgarh, created out of Madhya Pradesh, inherited it in the Madhya Pradesh Law, and has retained it so far.

A practice observed in Gujarat, 'Samras', has impacted women adversely. In Samras practice, the elections are not held, and the Sarpanch and Panch are pre-decided by the power holders of the village. The interesting part is that the villages that are declared Samras are appreciated by the Government by some appreciation amount, as the money which otherwise gets spent in elections is saved, and the community level harmony is also reflected. What was observed in the stories was that only those women come into Samras who are ready to succumb to the pressures of the male and dominant members of Panchayat. In this process, those women are left behind who actually have the will to work.

No Confidence Motion is another practice that has brought brunt to women's participation in PRIs. With the help of these two practices, women are seen to be targeted by Gujarat villagers. Here, the males often carry the mindset that an open seat means a seat 'only' for male aspirants at Panchayat level. Through the No Confidence Motion policy, Panchayat members target those women who try to work independently and do not yield to male dominance.

In most of the cases observed on ground, it was seen that women were not impacted much by the norms of loan repayment, electricity bill payment, not having criminal charges, and so on. It may be that the government employees on the job of checking women forms on these lines or on these aspects perceive women to be innocent, so they get their clearance very easily.

As per the stories from these states, women feel that criteria such as minimum education norms are arbitrary. Their experience has shown that wisdom plays a greater role than education at the local governance level, especially villages. Although more educated people should be a part of the political system, more ground reforms are needed before such a law is implemented. The intent is right, but



States	Education Criteria	Functional Toilets	Two Child Norm	Loan Repay-ment	Electricity Bill Payment	Not having any Criminal Charges	No Confidence Motion	Encroaching Government Land	Declare Assets and Liabilities
Haryana	Class 8 th pass for general category and class 5 th pass for SC category	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (Three fourths majority)	-	-
Rajasthan	Class 10 th pass for general category and class 8 th pass for SC category	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (Two thirds majority)	-	-
Karnataka	-	Yes (Not on any official paper)	-	-	-	Yes	Yes (Two thirds majority)	-	Yes
Chhattisgarh	Class 8 th Pass - the guidelines have not been passed by the State yet	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes (Not less than three fourths)	Yes	-
Maharashtra	Class 7 th Pass	Yes	Yes (Only in Municipal Elections)	-	-	Yes	Yes (Two thirds majority)	-	-
Gujarat	-	-	Yes	-	-	Yes	Yes (One half majority)	-	-

other factors also need to be looked into, which includes something as basic as education and sanitation infrastructure and provision. Nothing can be so alienated from reality.

According to them, this verdict completely ignores their outstanding work, when despite being illiterate, they played major roles in bringing the developmental procedure with effective implementation based on the local resources and local common and cultural knowledge.

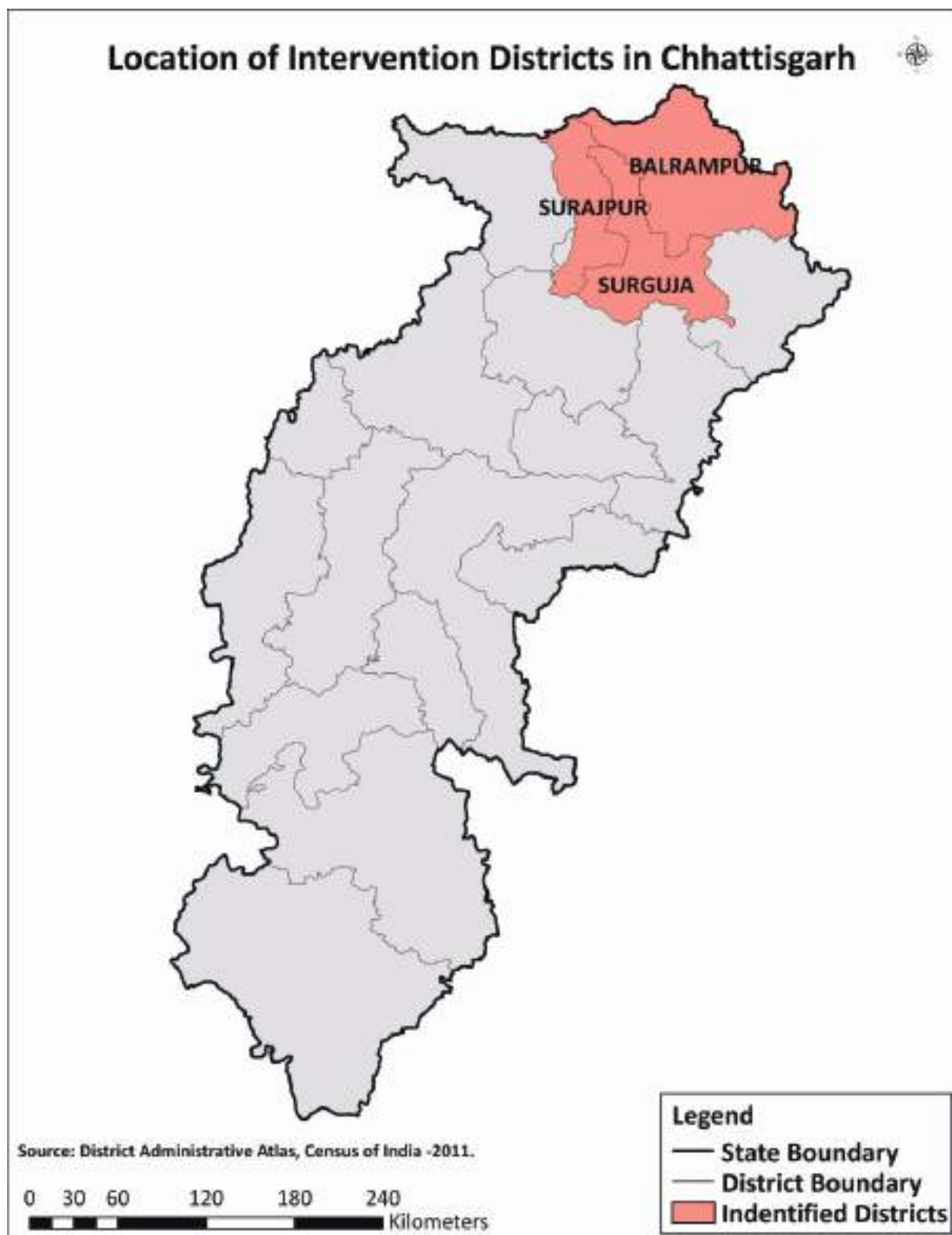
One reality that emerged from this field study was that women are only seen to contest on seats that are reserved; otherwise, the general perception is that unreserved seats are meant only for men. The sad part of the story is that women too do not consider themselves eligible for the unreserved seats. This is an aspect which needs attention and deeper probing.

Case Stories

Chhattisgarh



- a. Way to Success
- b. Prevailing Patriarchy creating Impediments in Women Empowerment
- c. Emerging Rules and Regulations: How far Effective and How far Restrictive
- d. Education Eligibility Restricts Ranjeeta's Dreams
- e. Kamla's Efforts being Marred by the State



Chhattisgarh

Chhattisgarh is one of the 29 states of India, located in the central-east part of the country. It is the tenth largest state in India, with an area of 135,198.5 km² (52,200.4 sq. mi). With a population of 25.5 million, Chhattisgarh is the 17th most populated state in the country. According to the 2011 Census, 70.28 per cent population of Chhattisgarh was found to be literate, out of which, 80.27 per cent were males and 60.24 per cent were females.

In Chhattisgarh, where on the one hand, government is laying emphasis on making education compulsory for children, on the other hand, the dropout rates in schools are increasing day by day. The main reason for dropouts is the absence of an education friendly environment and basic facilities to attract children to educational institutes in the tribal dominated state.

According to the national survey conducted by Social and Rural Research Institute (SRRI) in Chhattisgarh, the estimated dropout number of children in the age group of 6-13 years in 2014 was 1,67,072 out of a total of 44,59,796 children in schools. The survey says that the maximum dropouts from the school in the age group of 6-13 were after class II. Lack of interest in education, household work, lack of access, failure and non-flexibility in school timings are some of the major reasons of dropout, as reflected in the survey results.

Of these dropouts, most of the students were found to be girls. Their basic reason for dropout was the distance and absence of toilet facilities or poor condition of toilets in schools.

In a resource-rich state that is a source of electricity and steel for the country, accounting for 15 per cent of the total steel produced, more than half of the rural Scheduled Tribes (ST) and urban Scheduled Castes (SC) are poor. The rural ST population is monthly engaged in Tendu Patta (leaf) collection to ensure two meals a day. The poverty rate in Chhattisgarh is very high. The estimated poverty rate in 2004–05, based on uniform reference period consumption, was around 50 per cent, which is approximately double the all India level.

SC and ST population

With the exception of the hilly states of north-east India, Chhattisgarh has one of the highest share of ST populations, accounting for about 10 per cent of the STs in India. SCs and STs together constitute for more than 50 per cent of the state's population. The tribals are an important part of the state population, and they mainly inhabit the dense forests of Bastar and other districts of south Chhattisgarh.

Chhattisgarh has given 50 per cent reservation to women in state Panchayat elections. If we look at women representation in Chhattisgarh Panchayati Raj three tier system, in 2016 Chhattisgarh had a total of 1,58,776 seats, and out of which 87,549 women were elected as representatives in Panchayat on different posts. A total of 55.14 per cent women representatives have been selected in 2016 during the PRI elections, out of which 5,822 women were elected as Sarpanches.

Recommendations and Suggestions

- ✍ **Lack of proper devolution of functions, funds and functionaries has been revealed as one of the major challenges by several scholars. This has discouraged the elected women representatives from taking interest in the democratic decentralisation. For removing this drawback, the government should ensure the devolution of three Fs (functions, funds, and functionaries) through statutory provisions, and ensure effective tracking of the same. This will also promote accountability, transparency and coordination in the working of the Panchayati Raj system.**
- ✍ **Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Rural Development, and Ministry of Human Resource Development need to get engaged not only in the training of PRI members, but also bringing different stakeholders, especially media, academic and research institutes, to the forefront to get meaningfully engaged with the governance issues of Panchayats (more specifically with a gender lens).**

Overall, the condition of women in this state is not very satisfying in terms of girl's education and social status of women. Despite this, the state government is planning to impose minimum education rule and functional toilet rule for aspirants in Panchayat elections. The Government is not considering the ground reality of women in the state. According to the new minimum education policy, an aspirants for the Sarpanch post need to be 8th pass, or else they would not be eligible for the election. Many rural parts of the state are facing drought problems. In this situation, the villagers are not willing to use toilets, they rather prefer open defecation (ODF). Keeping this context in mind, toilet norms cannot work.

At present, in Chhattisgarh, the rules for contesting in panchayat elections are as follows:

- Toilet norms - Since the major part of the state is inhabited by ST and SC population, the government had given relaxation for this rule during the last elections. Government provides a three-month time period to those applicants who do not have a toilet in their homes, to get it built. If the candidate is not able to get it constructed in the given time, his or her membership gets terminated automatically.
- Minimum education norm - According to the current policy, the aspirant needs to be 5th pass to be eligible for elections.
- Criminal case - There should not be any criminal charge against the candidate, which is likely to get him/her a ten year sentence from the court.
- Any kind of payment to Cooperative bank or electricity bill should not be outstanding/due on the candidate.
- Non-confidence offer letter - If two-thirds or more members of the Panchayat body want to remove any elected candidate from his/her post, they can pass a non-confidence offer letter and remove the person after two years.

Way to Success

Introduction

In the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh, Surajpur is a block district. The district office of Surajpur is 256 kilometres from the state capital, Raipur. The total population of the district is 7,28,466, comprising 3,61,345 females. Vanaspati Singh, from Surajpur Block, is the Sarpanch of the Sonavadi Gram Panchayat. There are three villages under the Sonavadi Gram Panchayat, namely Sonavadi, Rameshpur and Narayanpur. The total population of the Panchayat is 5,000.

Vanaspati Singh is 33 years old, and has studied till class fifth. She lives in a joint family, which includes her father-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, a nephew, her husband and two sons. The family is financially stable. They have 20 acres of agricultural land that provides a livelihood support to their family. Besides this, Vanaspati's husband also works at the government health centre as a health assistant.

Vanaspati Singh has contested for the village Panchayat elections twice, in 2010 and 2015. In 2010, she had lost the election to Shyama Devi, while in 2015, she won. A reason for her defeat in 2010 was that Shyama Devi, the ex-Sarpanch, had been the Sarpanch for the past two terms, and was well known among the villagers.

Despite being satisfied with the work done by the ex-Sarpanch Shyama Devi, the villagers wanted a new face as their leader or maybe, the political equation had changed. Therefore, Shyama Devi, who had completed the construction of a primary and secondary school, one Anganwadi centre, and roads during her tenure, lost against Vanaspati during the elections in 2015.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

When Vanaspati started working as the new Sarpanch, it was a challenge for her to understand the duties and responsibilities, as it was her first term and she was not aware about the responsibilities of the Panchayat. Being a daughter-in-law of the village, it was not easy for her to organise meetings with the villagers and discuss work with them. She was hesitant to sit together with people, as it was a normal situation for her. But with the support of her husband and family, she started understanding her work. Today, Vanaspati is confident about her work, and organises and addresses the meeting herself. But the interesting part is that even though Vanaspati has started participating in the village meetings, it is still her husband who takes the decisions for her. Even today, her only job as the Sarpanch is to approve the official documents. Unfamiliar with the business and administrative world, she takes help of her husband when communicating with the higher officials is involved. Her husband accompanies her to the meetings with higher officials, and helps her in conversing with them.



Vanaspati Singh

Age:
33 Years

Caste:
Gaud (Scheduled Tribe)

Educational Qualification:
5th Pass

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Family Members:
8

Family's Source of Income:
Agriculture (20 acres land);
Government service

Annual Income of Family:
INR 50,000

Address:
Sonavadi Panchayat, Surajpur
Block, Surajpur District,
Chhattisgarh

In her tenure, Vanaspati has worked for the development of the Panchayat, including the construction of two pipelines for the disposal of water, a 2.8 kilometre long road from the Panchayat Bhavan to Mohalla Harijan Para, and an Anganwadi centre in Narayanpur village. Due to increase in the number of students in the primary school of village Rameshpur, a new classroom was constructed under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme. To solve the issue of water scarcity, besides getting eight small ponds constructed in the village, Vanaspati ensured approval for the construction of 20 additional ponds.

Four hand pumps were installed for drinking water, and 221 toilets were constructed. Vanaspati's husband helped her a lot in getting these projects completed, and personally supervised each one of these.

In this tenure, Vanaspati is learning the job of a Sarpanch. She is getting familiar with the external world, and has started interacting with others. She is now less hesitant as compared to her initial days, and wants to contest the next elections all by herself.

In the beginning, it was not easy for Vanaspati to organise and address public meetings. She was hesitant to sit and speak to the people of her village. Today, Vanaspati is learning the job of a Sarpanch, and is getting familiar with the external world. She is now less hesitant, and wants to contest the next elections.

Impact of Government Policies

The state has announced the new rule that restricts the eligibility to contest the Panchayat elections only to those who have completed minimum education till class 8. If this rule is passed in the next elections, many less educated, but capable, women like Vanaspati will not be able to contest the elections. On this, Vanaspati is both sad and happy. She says that she is sad as she wants to contest for the next term elections of the Panchayats, and if the rule is passed, she, along with many women like her, will get pushed away from participating. And yet, she is happy because if the rule is passed, it will get educated women to contest the elections, who can take care of the work by themselves, without anyone's assistance.

One of the residents of the village, Chandrika Prasad Rajwade, believes that the new eligibility rule of minimum education qualification will motivate educated people, especially women, to come to the forefront, since they will be in a better position to conduct the administrative work.

Vanaspati's husband, Yashwant, is naturally disappointed that the new eligibility rule will not allow Vanaspati to contest the elections next year, but at the same time, he appreciates the step as it will encourage educated women to come forward. "There will be no need of a Sarpach Pati then. Helping my wife with the official work takes up my entire day, leaving no personal space for myself. I want that educated women should come forward for the post of Sarpanch and Panch", shares Yashwant.

The new rule is an advantage for some, while some are at loss. The fact that women participation in local governance has increased substantially post the fifty per cent reservation rule is true. However, on one hand, if the proposed rule is passed, where a Panch is required to have completed minimum education till class 5th and Sarpanch till class 8 to be eligible to contest the elections, many interested women will have to step back. On the other hand, the young generation, being educated, will participate more in the upcoming elections.

Prevailing Patriarchy creating Impediments in Women Empowerment

Introduction

This is the story of Pramila Singh - the Sarpanch of Latori village, Surajpur block in district Surajpur. She had studied till class 5th under the Adult Education scheme, after which she was able to participate in the elections for the post of Sarpanch in 2015 team. This is her second term as Sarpanch, her first term being 2004-05. This seat has either been declared as an open seat or reserved for women. Pramila's family has been well known, and she has also been active in political areas. In the interim term, her brother was elected as the Sarpanch. She benefitted out of her brother's term, as the last Sarpanch. Owing to his influence, she could win the elections. When the seat was reserved for women, she contested in the elections and won.

On the flip side, despite being Sarpanch for two terms, she still does not have the right to function as one on ground. The entire functioning of Panchayat is being taken care of by the male members of the family, especially her husband. Pramila's husband has studied till class 8th, and works as a government officer. The official functioning of Panchayat is being managed by him along with his existing government job.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Pramila, being a homemaker, has minimal interaction with the outside world. She considers herself a misfit for the post of Sarpanch; however, because it was a reserved seat for women, she got the chance. Despite being the elected representative, she was never briefed about the roles and responsibilities of a Sarpanch. Moreover, she was not given any decision making power to function independently. Pramila's family stated that there is no such legislation or process in place for training the Sarpanch. Even though she presides and attends all meetings of the Panchayat, when it comes to meeting with officials, talking to them or discussing work, she depends on her husband. Her husband and family believe that Pramila, being less educated, will not be able to communicate well with the officials to get the work done.

In Latori Panchayat, every Friday, a local market functions and the Panchayat meeting also takes place.

Even though she has served as Sarpanch for two terms, she still has been unsuccessful in breaking the shackles of patriarchy. She is not even allowed to talk freely to strangers. Her husband, Kamlesh, believes that more than being educated, it is important to be aware of the existing problems in the villages and take appropriate action for the smooth functioning of the Panchayat.

He further stated that there are 20 Panches in the Panchayat, some of them even being educated. Yet, none of them get involved or advise on the functioning of the Panchayat, as they are incapable of thinking on those lines, or sharing any inputs.



Pramila Singh

Age:
47 years

Caste:
Scheduled Tribe

Educational Qualification:
Class 5

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Family Members:
7

Family Occupation:
Farming & related work

Monthly Family Income:
INR 3,000 to INR 4,000

Address:
Latori Panchayat, Surajpur Block,
District Surajpur, Chhattisgarh

Pramila, even after serving as Sarpanch for two terms, has been unsuccessful in breaking the shackles of patriarchy. Her husband and family believe that Pramila, being less educated, will not be able to communicate well with the officials to get the work done. She is not even allowed to talk freely to strangers, and does not have the right to function as one on ground.

While interacting with Pramila, it was quite evident that her husband and other male members of the family were not allowing her to talk. Her husband claimed that his wife is an absolute illiterate and has no understanding of the work they do. He further stated that because the seat was reserved for women candidate, she was the only one with the opportunity to become Sarpanch from our family, and hence they were compelled to make her the candidate. Hence, the details of all development work done by the Panchayat during Pramila's term were provided by her husband, and not her.

A business premise has been developed in the Panchayat, along with a 300-metre long Concrete Cement road. Under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) by the Government of India, drains were constructed for proper disposal of water. While listing their achievements, Sarpanch Pati, Kamlesh Singh, stated, "For the benefit of the residents of the Gram Panchayat Latori, they have proposed it to be included in the revenue department of Sarguja district. As a result, the villagers will no longer have to go very far for their government/official work. Currently, they have to travel to Surajpur block for any Tehsil related work, which is about 30km away from their village."

Apart from this, a community centre, which could not be constructed during the term of the previous Sarpanch, was now made possible during this term. A Health Centre and four Anganwadi centres were constructed under the supervision of the Sarpanch's Husband. During Pramila's first term, a Middle School also started functioning in their village. One of the residents of the village opinionated that the Lady Sarpanch attends all the Panchayat meetings, but all Panchayat related work is being done by her husband.

Impact of Government Policies

On one hand, with Pramila Singh being the Sarpanch for two consecutive years, her husband, Kamlesh Singh, states that for elections in Panchayati Raj institutions, education should not be a criterion. Thought process is more important, and hence he opposes the compulsion of such a criterion.

On the other hand, his wife has won the election twice, but is still just a namesake Sarpanch on the premise that she is uneducated, and all of this all is happening due to the prevailing patriarchal norms. Latori Panchayat Sarpanch is an example of how instead of introducing new schemes, what is also required is the empowering of women like her, and enabling them to exercise their rights and do the actual work on the ground, instead of just representing the position. The new schemes being proposed might actually cause regression in the empowerment process of women like Pramila. Although Pramila has won because of the women's seat reservation and is not allowed to do much work, she is at least present in all the Panchayat meetings. If the educational qualification criterion is further raised, she might even lose this opportunity and be caged in her house, again. This will destroy the entire purpose (even the hope) of helping her and the womenfolk to come at par with the men.

Emerging Rules and Regulations: How far Effective and How far Restrictive

Introduction

Located 440 km away from the state capital Raipur, district Balrampur – Ramanujganj is home to a population of 6,95,808. In the Rajpur block of this district, lies a non-descript village called Parsagudi. There is nothing special about this village, except for the little efforts that are being invested by its people for the development of their village. One such effort is being invested by twenty-nine-year-old Santoshi Sandliya, who is the current Sarpanch of this village. Santoshi, a mother to two children, has completed her education till class 5. Her husband, Tej Kumar Sandliya, has completed education till class 12 and is a farmer. They cultivate their 3.5 acre of land, which is the only source of their income.

In 2010, with introduction of the new rule that 50 per cent of seats are reserved for women in Panchayat elections, Maniyaro – another woman from the village – had won the elections. In 2015, Santoshi also contested for the same seat after her husband motivated her to participate in the Panchayat elections, and won the elections.

Maniyaro, despite being literate only to the extent that she can sign papers, has contributed a lot for the development of her village. During her term, she got three Cement Concrete (CC) roads, four kutcha roads and a community centre constructed. In 2015, Maniyaro lost the elections to Santoshi Sandliya. Political equations had changed in the village that year. Santoshi's husband, who was an Upsarpanch during Maniyaro's term, believed the public wanted to see a new face. He was known to the villagers. This proved to be beneficial for Santoshi, who won the elections that year.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

The villagers played a major role in motivating Santoshi, and making her contest and win the elections against Maniyaro. Although Santoshi was not well aware of the election procedure, she was supported by her husband who was there from the start till Santoshi learnt her way of handling the Panchayat work. He filled her nomination and after she won the elections, he helped her in understanding the routine work of the Gram Panchayat. Santoshi, who felt hesitant while organising and participating in Panchayat meetings, was assisted by her husband who kept motivating her.

It is an outcome of their team efforts that Santoshi has learnt the entire work and can now efficiently organise meetings in which she resolves issues of the villagers. Besides, she has organised two public meetings to address public grievances. As Gram Sabha meetings are organised on fixed days, she decided to have special public meetings twice a month, so that public can put forward their grievances and the Gram Panchayat can solve their issues.



Santoshi Sandliya

Age:
29 years

Caste:
Gaud, Scheduled Tribe

Educational Qualification:
Class 8

Marital status:
Married

Number of Family Members:
4

Family's Source of Livelihood:
Agriculture

Family's Monthly Income:
INR 4,000 - 5,000

Address:
Parsagudi Panchayat, Rajpur
Block, Balrampur - Ramanujganj,
Chhattisgarh

efficiently and timely. Santoshi takes most of the official decisions with the help of her team and Upsarpanch, and in consultation with her husband. She is yet to overcome her hesitation in dealing with the administrative officials, and that is the reason her husband still accompanies her at such meetings.

Santoshi is still being trained to understand the functioning of the Panchayat and development work, and currently lacks confidence while interacting with government officials. However, this has not been a hindrance in her commitment of working towards the development of the village. Santoshi has accomplished a lot of development work during her term. With the dedication of making her village open defecation free, Santoshi has pushed for the construction of toilets, and is leading the construction of 285 toilets in their village. For the convenience of travelling, she has built 10 CC roads in the village, and has facilitated the construction of 61 houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana. Besides the construction of one check dam, she has got a compound wall constructed for the Panchayat Bhavan and the High School in her village.

Santoshi has accomplished fair amount of development work during her tenure, and will continue to do so. However, it has not been an easy journey for her, and may not be easy for her successors either. As per the new government policy introduced in 2015, it is mandatory for participants to have a toilet in their home in order to contest the elections.

Impact of Government Policies

Santoshi has invested her days and nights in the development of the village and will continue to do so till the end of her term. But it has not been an easy journey for her and may not be easy for her successors either. As per the new government policy introduced in 2015, going beyond the literacy criteria, it was mandatory for the participants to have a toilet in their home, in order to contest the elections. However, when Santoshi had contested the elections, she did not have a toilet in her house. A pre-decided time was allotted to her to complete the construction of the toilet, which she successfully did.

Shyam Lal Gupta, who works as an accountant at the Rajpur Block office, says, “In 2015, the toilet criterion came to force. However, three-months’ time was given for the construction of toilet after winning the elections, and not following the timeline meant removal from the post. This exception was made only because it was a multi-ethnic tribal village.” And that is the reason why Santoshi got time to get a toilet constructed in her house. Santoshi not only completed the construction of the toilet in her house, but also ensured that everyone uses it. New state level government rules were also fulfilled by Santoshi. However, it is difficult to say if such leniency would be granted in the upcoming elections. It is difficult to estimate the effect of such a rule on the participation of many eligible women in the next elections.

Education Eligibility Restricts Ranjeeta's Dreams

Introduction

Thirty-year old Ranjeeta lives in Asola Village of Ambikapur Block in Sarguja District. She had completed her education till class 6th, after which she had to drop out of school, owing to the poor financial condition of her family. Her father was a labourer who worked hard day and night to make ends meet.

Today, Ranjeeta is married and has four children – two boys and two girls. Born and brought up in ward Namna of Ambikapur Block, Ranjeeta now lives in Asola Gram Panchayat after her marriage. Her family's only source of income is their two-acre land that they cultivate to fulfil their daily needs.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Ranjeeta had contested for the post of Sarpanch for the first time in 2015, and that too against six contenders from the same area. She won the post. This is her first term as a Sarpanch. In 2010, the new rule that reserved 50 per cent of seats for women in Panchayat elections had reached the Asola Gram Panchayat. That year, Kayaso Bai had won the elections. According to Ranjeeta's husband, Avash Munda, Kayaso Bai as a Sarpanch could only get two CC roads constructed in the village. Although she had started the construction of an extra compartment in the compound of middle school, she had left it incomplete. The construction was then completed by Ranjeeta.

Ranjeeta, owing to her low education level, finds it difficult to read and understand documents related to Panchayat. Her husband, who is a little more educated than her, helps her in all such tasks. In the initial phase of her term, Ranjeeta was unaware of the functioning of Panchayat, and used to feel hesitant to organise Panchayat meetings. Later, with support of her husband, she started organising the meetings. Slowly, she learnt the functioning of Panchayat, and through her work, won hearts of the villagers. Through this support, Ranjeeta felt confident and learnt to do her work independently.

Ranjeeta has accomplished a long list of development work for her village. During her term, she not only got four hand pumps fixed in the village, but also proposed to higher authorities for the construction of a water tank to fulfil the water requirement of villagers. She also got old wells repaired. She is hopeful that soon the water crisis will be resolved in the village, ensuring availability of water to every villager.

In the field of education and welfare of children, Ranjeeta has not only got a high school constructed in the village, but is also getting constructed a playground for them. Seeing an increase in the number of enrollments in



Ranjeeta Munda,
Present Sarpanch

Age:
30 years

Caste:
Munda, Scheduled Tribe

Educational Qualification:
Class 6

Marital Status:
Married

Family Members:
6

Family Occupation:
Agriculture

Monthly Income of Family:
INR 3,000-4,000

Address:
Asola Village, Ambikapur Block,
Sarguja, Chhattisgarh

primary and middle school, two additional rooms have also been constructed. For infants and children below the age of three, Ranjeeta has got two Anganwadis constructed. For the disposal of waste water, sewer pipes have also been constructed under MNREGA.

As a woman leader, Ranjeeta has great dreams for the girls and women of her Gram Panchayat. She believes that it is important for girls to pursue education and become independent. She also believes that women in her village, with whatever education they have, should get associated with Self Help Groups to become financially independent.

Besides organising regular meetings of the Panchayat, Ranjeeta makes it a point that public meetings are also organised regularly to ensure the grievances of locals are resolved. Being a good leader, Ranjeeta knows the importance of being a team player, which is well reflected in her way of working. All development related work is done only after a consensus is drawn from all the ward leaders. Ranjeeta's husband helps her in all these tasks as she still finds it a little difficult to deal with the higher officials.

Ranjeeta has great dreams for girls and women of her Gram Panchayat. She believes that it is important for girls to pursue education and become independent. Besides organising regular meetings of Panchayat, she also makes it a point to organise public meetings to ensure the grievances of locals are resolved.

Impact of Government Policies

Ranjeeta could contest and win the last elections as she had attained education till class 6. She proved herself through hard work, which helped her gain confidence and support of the villagers. But with introduction of the new eligibility norm that requires completion of class 8th for a woman candidate, Ranjeeta and other women like her will not be able to contest the elections. This rule will become a hindrance for many such women who are not educated but have the zeal and commitment to work for the progress of their village. Ranjeeta shares that these eligibility criteria will restrict participation of many women like her in the next elections. She believes that this rule should be amended, as only then will many illiterate, but deserving, women be able to step out of their houses and participate in Panchayat elections. This, according to her, can revolutionise the way Panchayat's work.

When asked about an opinion on the new rule, Monu Yadav, one of the villagers, said, "The older generation of the village is illiterate. However, the younger generation is getting relatively more opportunities to attain better education. The illiterates in the village are also getting educated under government initiatives. I feel that in the next elections, academic qualification will not be a restriction for most of the villagers." He predicts that the next elections will see maximum participation from the younger and more educated generation, especially girls. On the other hand, older women who have worked hard all these years, but do not fulfil the criteria, may not be able to contest the elections."

This new rule will probably help in getting educated PRI members, but at the same time will restrict a large population of women from entering the elections. An entire generation of less educated women will not be able to use their democratic right to contest elections.

Kamla's Efforts being Marred by the State

Introduction

Located 440 km away from the state capital of Chhattisgarh, Balrampur is a backward district. Six blocks of this district inhabit a population of 6,95,808 as per the 2011 Census, while the population of Karji Panchayat is 1,550. Kamla Kujur is the Sarpanch of this Panchayat that falls under the Rajpur Block. Kamla is 40 years old and she belongs to Sanna village of Bageecha Block (Jaspur District). She had shifted to Karji in 1992 after her marriage.

Kamla has attained education till class 5 under the education programme for adults, while her husband is a graduate. Her family consists of her husband and three daughters. The main source of livelihood for her family is agriculture, which is looked after by her husband. Subsistence farming of crops and vegetables on their 2.5 acre land not only allows her family to fulfil their daily needs, but also to earn INR 3,000-4,000 per month by selling the extra produce.

Though Kamla is the daughter-in-law of this village, she loves to socialise, help people and listen to them, and considers this as an important part of her daily schedule. When reservation of seats was announced for women, villagers who saw Kamla as an empathetic woman supported her to become the Sarpanch. They convinced Kamla to contest the elections, and she thus faced minimum opposition, and was happily accepted by them.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

After serving twice as Sarpanch, Kamla has been re-elected for the third time. The women's seat for the post of Sarpanch was introduced to Karji in 1995-96, and it was then that she won the majority for the first time. Then in 2004-2005, she stood for the election for the second time, and won again.

There is a long list of work done by Kamla as woman Sarpanch for the development of the Karji Panchayat. Besides getting a ration shop opened in Karji Panchayat, she has got four Concrete Cement roads constructed. Decisions related to development are taken by Kamla herself, in consultation with the Panch and Upsarpanch. To understand the issues being faced by the villagers, she organises public meetings twice a month. To make her Panchayat "open defecation free", she has constituted a committee after taking approval from the Gram Sabha. The committee (consisting of five people from the village) penalises villagers who defecate in open. This team of five people conducts surveillance early in the morning in isolated areas as well as in agriculture fields, to ensure that open defecation is not practiced.

An extra room has been constructed at the Anganwadi Centre of the Panchayat to ensure that the food distributed via Anganwadi is cooked under hygienic conditions. To address the health related needs of the villagers, Kamla proposed for a sub centre, and after persistent efforts, she got one established in the village. Four small ponds were constructed along



Kamla Kujur, Sarpanch

Age:
40 years

Caste:
Uranv, Scheduled Tribe

Educational Qualification:
Class 5

Marital Status:
Married

Family Members:
5

Family's Source of Income:
Agriculture

Family's Monthly Income:
INR 3,000-4,000

Address:
Karji Panchayat, Rajpur Block,
District – Balrampur,
Ramanujanj, Chhattisgarh

with three hand pumps to solve the issue of water scarcity, besides renovating the old hand pumps. In addition to this, the Primary School and Panchayat Bhavan were also repaired.

According to Sumar Saay, a resident of the village, “Kamla has worked extensively for the development of the village. She has put in efforts to solve the issue of water scarcity. Many people have received benefits under Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (PMAY). We want Kamla to become our Sarpanch again.” This statement reflects the popularity Kamla has gained through her work.

In the initial phase of her first term, Kamla faced work related issues, and was also low on confidence. She shared, “During the initial phase, it was difficult for me to organise meetings and speak in front of people. At that time, my husband supported me a lot.” She further added that her husband used to accompany her everywhere for Panchayat related work. He used to help her communicate with the officers. Kamla gained confidence slowly, and with her hard work and determination, she now handles the entire work on her own. She has acquired the capability to take work related decisions with the help of other members of the Panchayat. Kamla, as a Sarpanch, not only efficiently fulfils the assigned tasks of the Panchayat, but also does not hesitate to communicate with the concerned officers about issues related to the development work of the village.

Kamla has worked extensively for the development of the village, and has gained confidence with her hard work and determination. She is now able to handle all the development work on her own, and has acquired the capability to take decisions. Moreover, Kamla strongly communicates issues related to the development work of the Panchayat to the concerned officers.

Impact of Government Policies

Kamla, who is popular among the locals, perhaps will not be able to participate in the elections of 2020. The recent guidelines to contest the elections for the position of Sarpanch demand the contestant to be a class 8th pass out. This is a big hurdle for Kamla. Despite being a part of the development process, and gaining popularity and love of the villagers, she cannot participate in the Panchayat elections. This is not limited to the case of Kamla and her dreams. Many other women from the village, who are not educated till class 8, but want to work for the betterment of their community, will not be able to contest the elections.

Kamla believes that in the years to come, it will be easier to find women who have attained education till class 8, as various government policies have made that possible. Parents are now also sending their daughters for pursuing education, but it is quite difficult to find literate women in the age bracket of Kamla. This eligibility criteria will snatch away the opportunity from these women to participate in the Panchayat elections.

“Education doesn’t always guarantee maturity. I am a class 5th pass out, but I have accomplished many important tasks for the development of the village. Such guidelines will inhibit women from participating in Panchayat and government works”, opines Kamla.

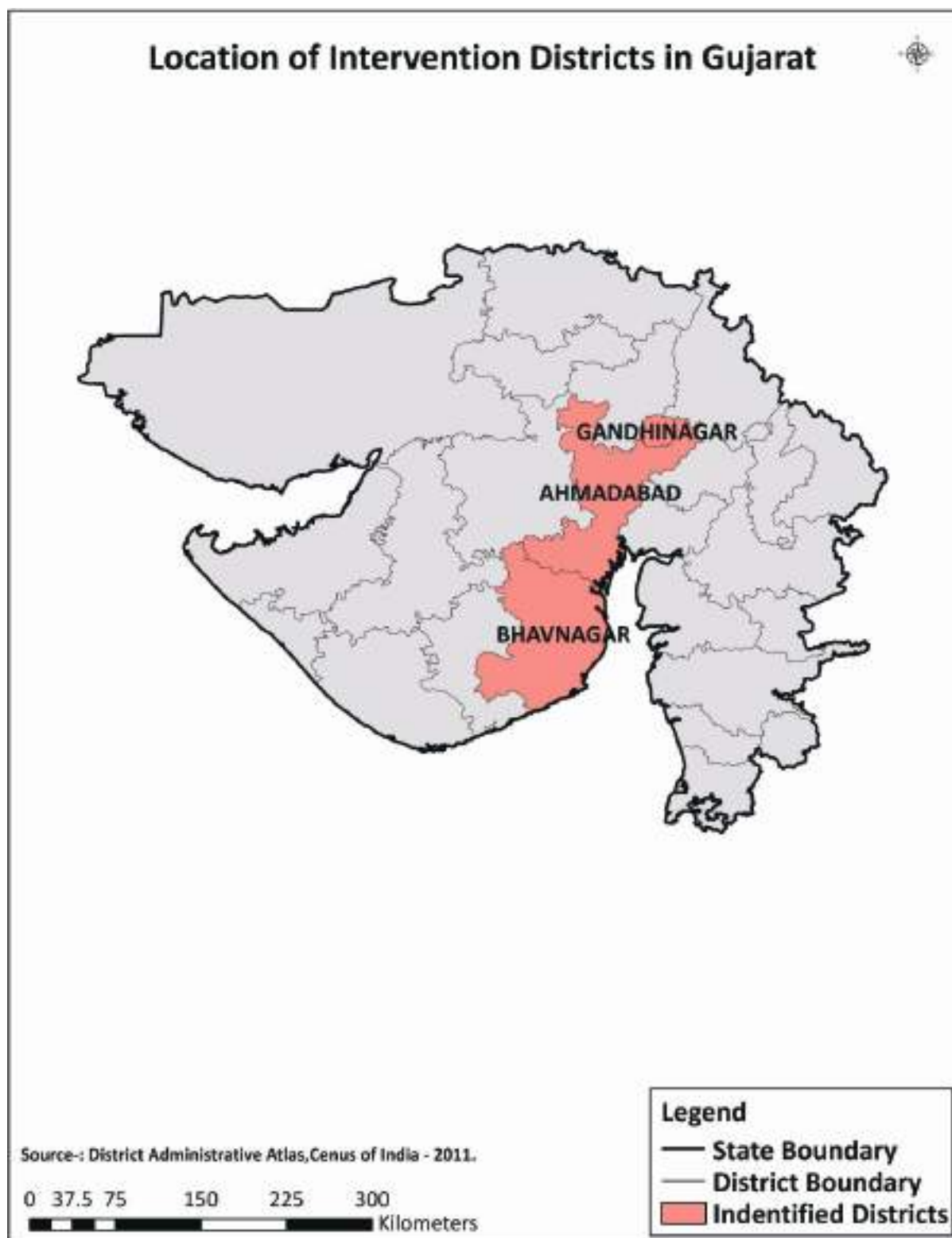
As Kamla is determined to overcome all the barriers, she has decided that she will again contest the elections the next time, and for this, she will fulfil all the required eligibility criteria. She has decided that she will pursue further education under Bharat Mission, and after completing class 8 examination, she will contest the elections. It is important to see if any other guideline from the government will create hindrance for Kamla.

Case Stories

Gujarat



- a. Need to Question the Credibility of the 'No-Confidence Motion'
- b. Rule by Proxy: How Men take Advantage of Policies
- c. One Village, One Law and 60 People's Exclusion
- d. Samras Panchayat Restricts Role of Women in Panchayat
- e. Oppression Worse than Poor Policies



Gujarat

Gujarat is situated in the western part of India, and it shares its international border with Pakistan. Gujarat is primarily known for Sabarmati Ashram and Mahatama Gandhi, but also for other things, such as the Rann of Kutch (white desert), it being the diamond hub, as well as a textile hub of the country.

As per the data from Census 2011, Gujarat has a population of 6.04 crores, an increase from the figure of 5.07 crores in 2001. From the total population of Gujarat, 78.03 per cent is literate, and among these, 85.75 per cent are males and 69.68 per cent are females, which is better as compared to the other states of India.


However, Gujarat is also known for discrimination against women in village Panchayat politics. In the Panchayat elections, caste related politics and patriarchal mindset in the society are seen to be influencing the participation of women. This has resulted in women being denied equal status in socio-economic and political spheres, which are, by and large, dominated by men. The studies and data have shown that it is a myth that women are not interested in public life and have no time to attend meetings and shoulder the responsibilities as Elected Women Representatives (EWRs). Rural women have very well demonstrated their deep political consciousness and interest in working as EWRs.

Women do get chances of contesting in panchayat elections due to reservations, but entry of women in governance does not necessarily mean that all women have automatically acquired political power. Those who have been able to demonstrate themselves as capable leaders have struggled to reach to that position. There are several constraints, which prevent women from coming forward to take part in the development process of the society.

In Gujarat, the socio-cultural factors are seen to be affecting women's participation in the PRI elections. The women Sarpanches are not allowed to attend meetings or to express themselves before male members in the meetings. Women are not allowed to go out alone. The male relatives either escort them or attend the meetings on their behalf. If a woman works on her own and wants to take steps for the development work, then other male members of the Panchayat display intolerance and try to remove the woman from her position to teach her a lesson.


A large numbers of EWRs are found to face resistance from their male counterparts if they wish to work independently. Male Upsarpanches find an empowered woman Sarpanch as a hindrance in their way. In the last four years, it has also been seen that a large number of no confidence motions have been brought out against women Sarpanches.

Recommendations and Suggestions

 **Women elected for the first time should get training on how to do the Panchayat work at least four times in a year, and this training should be organised on a decentralised basis. It may be good if the trainings are followed by tracking of the learning outcomes, otherwise trainings may keep happening but results would not be seen on ground.**

Throughout this study, this point has been repeatedly quoted that though EWRs need training, they do not get permissions to attend residential trainings at Headquarters or state capitals, and hence the recommendation of conducting trainings at the block level and mobilising families to allow EWRs to attend trainings.

Exposure of EWRs to new areas, and meetings with with experienced EWRs would help them learn by interaction, discussion and observation.

 **The Sarpanch's and Panch's salaries are very less, due to which not many people show enthusiasm to contest. If their allowances or wages are enhanced, better and deserving people could come forward.**

It has been a general perception that women are not capable of participating in politics, but some of the EWRs, through their good work, have proved this wrong. For instance, Geeta Ben - former Sarpanch of Piparla Panchayat, Bhav Nagar, faced no confidence motions in 2017. She failed to prove herself, and fought again in 2018 by-poll election, and unfortunately lost again. Geeta Ben's will demonstrated that she is a fighter and she has been interested in village development.

Gujarat has given 50 per cent reservation to women in Panchayat elections in a total of 33 districts. According to 2016 Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) data, Gujarat has overall 1,32,726 Panchayat seats. A total of 43,670 women are working as EWRs on different posts, and of these, 4,600 women are seated as Sarpanches. If we talk about the overall percentage of women representation in Gujarat Panchayats, it is reported to be 32.97 per cent, which is remarkably lower as compared to other states.

In Gujarat, the rules for participation of EWRs in the Panchayat elections are as follows:

- Law of two children - If the candidate has more than two children after February 2005, he/she cannot participate in the election.
- Non-Confidence offer letter - If two-thirds or more of the Panchayat body wants to remove any elected person from his/her post, then they can release him/her a non-confidence letter, and remove the person from the position.
- Samras Scheme - If the entire set of Panchayat members gets elected without an election process, the particular Panchayat gets an extra grant from the state government.
- Toilet rule - The contestant must have a water-provided toilet in his/her house.
- Any kind of payment to a Cooperative Bank, or an electricity bill, should not be outstanding/due on the candidate.
- Criminal Case - There should not be any such criminal charge sheet on the candidate in which he/she is likely to get a ten year sentence from the court.

Need to Question the Credibility of the 'No-Confidence Motion'

Introduction

Geeta Devi resides in Piprala Gram Panchayat of Sihor Taluka, Bhavnagar District. The total population of Piprala village is 2000, and the total number of women present in the village is around 800. The percentage of total literate population in Bhavnagar district is 75.52, of which the percentage level of literate women is 66.08.

Geeta's family consists of four members – husband, two sons and three daughters who are married. The family belongs to the Koli community, which in Gujarat is categorised under Other Backward Classes (OBC). The economic situation of the household is not strong. Geeta works as an ASHA worker that secures her INR 1500 per month, while her husband works as a driver earning approximately INR 8000 per month. In the year 2016, Geeta became the Sarpanch of Piprala for the first time. She had contested the election in 2010 as well, but could not win. As a Sarpanch, Geeta has dealt with a few challenging incidents that have been etched in her memory forever.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

In 2016, Sihor Panchayat announced reservation of seats for women candidates belonging to the Scheduled Caste. Geeta participated in the elections that year, and won with a huge margin of 500 votes. This was not only a remarkable win in the political arena, but also a historic change for Sihor Panchayat. Till now, Sihor was known for conducting harmonious elections in which candidates were elected unopposed. Geeta not only became the first woman Sarpanch of Sihor, but also the first ever Sarpanch who won the election with a due electoral process. Even the preceding elections had been conducted under this tradition, where Chandu Bhai Joshi was elected as the Sarpanch by a mutually agreed decision, and therefore, Geeta's win was a breakthrough moment that ended the tradition of an unopposed election in Sihor.

The first step that she took on being elected as the Sarpanch, was to stop corruption in the Panchayat's ration depot. The people working at the village ration shop used to demand ten rupees from the villagers for providing them ration, which was an extremely disturbing situation. Geeta complained about the same, starting from the T.D.O office till the District level, but the response from everywhere was the same - it did not fall under their jurisdiction. At the end, Geeta complained to the B.D.O. about the issue, and it was then that the corrupt ration depot owner was replaced by a new person. Geeta mentioned that in the short span of six months as a Sarpanch, she had got the grants issued from the government for water and road construction in her village.



Geeta

Age:
39 Years

Educational Qualification:
Class 3

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Members in the Family:
4

Occupational Status of the Family:
Self-employed and ASHA worker

Monthly Income of the Family:
INR 9,500

Address:
Village Piprala Taluka Sihor,
Bhavnagar District, Ahmedabad

Geeta not only became the first woman Sarpanch of Sihor, but was also the first ever Sarpanch to win the election with a due electoral process. Her victory disrupted the tradition of unopposed elections, but the fellow Panch members did not appreciate her ability to independently manage the responsibilities of a Sarpanch. A no-confidence motion was then passed against her, and she was removed from the post of Sarpanch within seven months.

Geeta was also responsible for getting a bus stand constructed for Sihor, and drains for her village.

When talking about Geeta, villagers mentioned that she never does a task without discussing it with the villagers, and this method of discussion is disliked by her fellow Panch members. Geeta says that her fellow Panch members did not like the fact that a woman was able to handle the responsibilities of a Sarpanch all by herself.

According to Geeta, people from all castes were unhappy with her, because for the past several years, the village had been conducting unopposed elections and had never given an opportunity to a woman. Geeta had participated in the 2010 elections with an aim to break this tradition of unopposed elections, but was not successful. She had lost the elections, but was able to successfully disrupt the tradition. After this, Geeta started to work as an ASHA worker, and during this period, she performed many tasks that aimed towards the empowerment of women. Prior to winning the elections, Geeta took the village women to the health centre, and met them regularly so as to help them maintain good health. Geeta was able to win the hearts of the villagers through her hard work. Geeta states that being a woman, she had to face discrimination at various times. Further, she describes that whenever she visited the Taluka office for Panchayat related work, she never received correct information, and that even for trivial issues, she was made to visit the office multiple times.

By filling the motion of No Confidence, Geeta was removed from the post of Sarpanch within seven months, and after her removal, the post of Sarpanch in Sihor was vacant for six months. During this period, Upsarpanch, Hansa Ben, overtook the responsibility of Sarpanch; and the development process in the village stopped, as she only worked on the programmes that were introduced by Geeta Devi, and did not take any initiative on her own.

Impact of Government Policies

It was seven months into Geeta's first session that the motion of No Confidence was proposed by the Panch members of her Gram Panchayat. All the seven votes were against her. According to Geeta, she received this motion of No Confidence because she was continuously working with her intelligence, while her colleagues wanted her to work according to their wish and will. Geeta shares that in 2016 elections, all the three women candidates were threatened by the political party in opposition, but no threat could deter Geeta. The party in opposition filed nomination of four candidates. All of them, after winning the elections, influenced rest of the members of the Panchayat to vote against Geeta; and in a matter of seconds, she became an ex-Sarpanch.

Geeta did not sit quietly after the motion of No Confidence. She filed applications at all levels - Tehsil, Taluka and District - citing that she has become the victim of conspiracy by the male members of the Panchayat.

Geeta informs that she was not only forced to resign from her post, but was also offered a bribe of INR 2 lakhs to not report the matter to higher authorities. Geeta, unaffected, did not give up and kept on trying. She, however, lost the battle.

Despite being removed from the post of Sarpanch due to the motion of No Confidence, Geeta found support among the villagers who wanted her to lead them as their Sarpanch. They wanted to file an application at the District Head Quarters, but Geeta asked them to remain calm. She was aware that after the motion of No Confidence, no one would listen to them at any level.

After removal from the post of Sarpanch, she again contested for the elections in 2018, but got defeated by 81 votes. In 2018, Hansa Koli, the previous Upsarpanch, won the post. Although Hansa Koli is the official Sarpanch on papers, all the work and decisions are undertaken by her son. This was the reason Geeta was not accepted, as she never allowed anyone to unnecessarily interfere in the Panchayat work.

According to Geeta, this law is unfair. She states that while the public supports PRI members to get elected through their votes, in the motion of No Confidence – they do not get to participate. All the decisions are taken at the Panchayat level, and this is done to fulfil their vested interests, as in this case. So, the villagers should also be involved in the process of passing the motion of No Confidence. Geeta demands that the government should facilitate and encourage an environment where women leaders can participate and work freely in Panchayats. Government systems should provide such assistance, rather than being neutral.

Rule by Proxy: How Men take Advantage of Policies

The 73rd amendment of the constitution of India is considered to be a milestone, as it promoted participation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. There was a hope that with this amendment, the role of women in development of the village, as well as their participation in Panchayats would increase. However, the deep-rooted patriarchy has shackled women to an extent that they are unable to exercise their rights freely. One can find similar stories spread across India. In this article, stories of Dhundhka Taluka in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, are being shared.

Many women of this Taluka have been elected as Sarpanches, but they hold the post only on papers. In reality, they are not allowed to step out of their house, go to public spaces or talk to men. Their role is limited to signing the papers, while all other roles and responsibilities are performed by the male members of their family.

Story of Jaya Ben

There are several villages in Dhundhka, like Gunjar, Kadol, Kanjiya, Kothadiya Galsana and Moresiya, where a woman is the Sarpanch. In 2017, the seat of Sarpanch of Gunjar Gram Panchayat was reserved for a woman. 35-year old Jaya Ben contested and won the election by a margin of 250 votes. Jaya Ben has a family of four, which includes two children and her husband. Jaya Ben herself is uneducated, and her husband has studied till class 6th. The Gunjar Gram Panchayat has a population of 4000, and the majority of people earn their livelihoods by polishing diamonds.

Jaya Ben's husband, Kanji Bhai Jadav, who currently holds the title of Sarpanch-Pati, has been an Upsarpanch in the Gram Panchayat. This is the reason Jaya Ben had to contest the election of Sarpanch, even when she was not interested. The villagers, too, wanted her to file the nomination.

Jaya's Husband filed her nomination for the election, and rallied for her as well. But despite being the Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat, Jaya has no knowledge regarding the functioning of the same. She says that her husband attends all the meetings of the Panchayat and solves majority of the village problems. On being asked about the future course of action and the requirements of the village, Jaya Ben was unaware, and said that her husband will be able to respond to this as he takes care of everything, and that her presence is only felt when her thumbprint is required.

Kanji Bhai Jadav (Sarpanch-Pati) informs that in Jaya Ben's tenure as a Sarpanch, a bus was arranged from the transport department to make travel easier and safer for girl students. The construction of a road and sewage was also completed.





Jaya's husband filed her nomination for the election, and rallied for her as well. Despite becoming the Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat, Jaya has no knowledge on the functioning of the same. She says that her husband attends all meetings of the Panchayat and solves majority of the village problems.

Story of Hansa Ben

Hansa Ben belongs to Kothadiya Panchayat of Dhundhka Taluka. Kothadiya has a population of 1000, and had a seat reserved for women in 2017. Hansa Ben Makwana won that seat with a margin of 189 votes. Hansa Ben belongs to the weaver community. She is 36 years old, and is educated till class 3rd. She cannot read and write. Hansa Ben lives with her husband and three children. The family's financial condition is not very strong, and they lead a simple life. Hansa Ben herself is an agriculture labour, whereas her husband works as an electrician.

Majority of the people in Kothdiya Panchayat belong to the Darbar Community. It was their decision to make Hansa Ben contest the election of Sarpanch. Even after winning the elections, Hansa Ben takes care of household chores, while the decisions of Panchayat are taken by her husband, which are often influenced by the villagers. Hansa Ben has not once stepped into her office as a Sarpanch till date. Although development has taken place in Hansa Ben's tenure, she has no knowledge of the same. Requisitions for installation of gas stoves for 200 people have been sent, out of which 80 have got the stoves, while the rest are waiting. Another development work in the pipeline is to build houses under the Housing Scheme. The Anganwadi and the Panchayat Bhawan have been repaired, and roads and sewage pipes have been constructed. But in all this, Hansa Ben has no role to play. All the tasks have been undertaken by her husband, as directed by the villagers.

Story of Mavu Dhanji

Kotda is a Gram Panchayat in Dhundhka Taluka of Ahmedabad, with a population of 6,000. In 2017, the seat for Sarpanch was reserved for a female candidate. Mavu Dhanji Rathore contested the election and won. The village comprises different castes, such as Thakur, Rathore, Kodi Patel, Bhadwad, Pagi, etc. There are five families belonging to the Bharwad community, and Mavu Ben's family is one of them. Mavu Ben lives with her husband, two children and a mother-in-law. Mavu Ben is educated till class 6th, but like Jaya Ben of Gunjar Gram Panchayat, her role as a Sarpanch is only limited to signing the papers. She has no knowledge of the functioning of the Panchayat.

In the two hours that were spent with her, Mavu could not respond to even one question. Every answer was given by Mavu Ben's husband, Dhanji Bhai, who made it clear that Mavu Ben is required only to sign the papers, while the entire functioning of the Panchayat is handled by him.

On being asked what motivated Mavu Ben to contest the election, Dhanji Bhai replied that if the seat of Sarpanch had been a regular seat, he himself would have contested to be the Sarpanch; but since the seat was reserved for a woman candidate, he forced Mavu Ben to stand in the election. He filed her nominations and submitted all the documents on her behalf. Mavu Ben never wanted to contest the election.

Dhanji Bhai Rathore shared that he had solved the problem of water shortage in the village by dispensing his personal cash. This was the reason that the villagers elected his wife Mavu Ben as the Sarpanch.

Story of Rekha Ben

Rekha Ben is the Sarpanch of Kanjiya Gram Panchayat. Her husband says that in Rekha Ben's tenure as a Sarpanch, because of his efforts, roads were constructed, and the Anganwadi centre was repaired and renovated. The staff of Anganwadi was given a permanent status. There was a problem of sexual harassment being faced by the women of Morasis village while going to Dhundhka Taluka for education. As a Sarpanch Pati, he filed a petition in the Taluka office and solved the problem.

Interaction with the women Sarpanches reflected the need for providing them continuous training, instead of a one-time training, to understand the functioning of the Panchayat and their responsibilities. One session that takes place immediately after the Sarpanch is elected is not sufficient, and the participation of women Sarpanches is also very less. "The families of the women Sarpanches do not allow them to go for the training. Very often, the information about the training is also passed on to their husbands by the training officials, and so female Sarpanches don't even get to know about it", says Jaya Ben.

Mavu Ben is of the opinion that if she gets regular training from the government, she will be able to understand the functioning of the Panchayat, which will give her the self-confidence and knowledge to work independently. This will reduce her dependency on the male members, who will eventually stop interfering.

The families of women Sarpanches do not allow them to go for the training. Very often, information about the training is passed on to the husbands by the training officials, and so the female Sarpanches do not even get to know about it, says Jaya ben.

One Village, One Law and 60 People's Exclusion

Introduction

Located 198 kilometres from the capital of Gujarat, Bhavnagar is prominently known for its “Gathiya”. Lajpat Nagar (alias) is a village in Shihor Taluka of Bhavnagar. But after this story, Bhavnagar will also be known for excluding 30 families from participating in Panchayat elections (30 families i.e. 30 couples or 60 people). It is known by all that couples with more than two children are forbidden from contesting in elections as per the state-level guidelines of the Panchayati Raj. Any family having a third child born after February 2005 cannot take part in Panchayati Raj elections. This rule has eliminated the possibility of 30 families willing to contest in the elections of Panchayati Raj.



Story of Jyoti and Yogesh

Jyoti and Yogesh (alias) are among the couples who have been affected by this rule. The couple has three children, and resides in the Gram Panchayat of Lajpat Nagar. Jyoti has received education till class 7th, and Yogesh till 5th. They belong to the category of Other Backward Castes. Yogesh works as a labourer in “Swachh Bharat Mission” and earns approximately INR 48,000 per annum. Jyoti lives in a joint family that includes her husband, two children and her in-laws, taking the family count to seven.

Jyoti and Yogesh got married in 2001. They had their first child in 2002 - a girl child. Her second child was also a girl. She was against the idea of having a third child, but pressure from the elders of the family for a grandson resulted in another childbirth in 2006. Jyoti and Yogesh kept telling the Gram Panchayat how conceiving another child was done under the pressure of their own family members. Jyoti is not the only woman in Lajpat Nagar to be forced for a third child. A number of reasons can be held accountable for this. In such cases, women's aims and aspirations are not taken into any consideration. Jyoti further notifies that women are never asked for their opinion regarding family planning, and they just have to obey their elders' orders. Jyoti states that there should be more flexibility and freedom for women with respect to such rules. Implementation of rigid laws constricts the growth of women, and so these should be stopped once and for all.

Jyoti expressed her willingness to stand for the position of Sarpanch in Panchayat elections of 2016, but the rule of having not more than two children kept her from doing so. In 2016 elections, the seat of Lajpat Nagar Panchayat was reserved for a woman. Jyoti's mother-in-law currently holds the position of a Panch, and works in conformity to the responsibilities assigned to her. She was elected in 2016 elections, but that chance could not be availed by Jyoti. She hopelessly informs that very often, such women

Women are never asked for their opinion regarding family planning; they only have to obey their elders' orders. Jyoti states that there should be more flexibility and freedom for women with respect to such rules. Implementation of rigid laws restricts the growth of women, and so these should be stopped once and for all.

are elected who either do not want to carry the burden of the responsibility, or are not allowed to work after winning. Many a times, people who do not have any idea about the kind of work that is to be done are elected, and people who do know and are even willing to work are left out because they are bound by the rigid rules. Yogesh adds that it takes two to three years for an unwilling new person to understand the way a Panchayat works, bringing all the development work to a halt.

Yogesh is not the only one chained by the stringent rule. He informed that there are approximately 60 families who are willing to contest the elections but cannot do so because of this very rule. Jyoti says, “If I could become the Sarpanch, I would install a fresh water pipeline in the village. The fresh water pipe of Narmada River is just 7 km from our village.” She wants to construct a water pipe from that line, and bring an end to the act of stealing of water.

Their village is home to about 350 homeless families who belong to Valmiki and Devi Poojak community. According to Jyoti, no one in their village has been allotted land under the “Indira Aawas Yojana” since 1989. She wants to help the landless people by providing the benefits of the Scheme. She also has plans to construct a healthcare centre and an Anganwadi.

Approximately 30 families willing to contest the elections of Panchayati Raj are forbidden from doing so. As per the state-level guidelines, any family having a third child born after February 2005 cannot take part in the Panchayati Raj elections.

Story of Kamla Ben

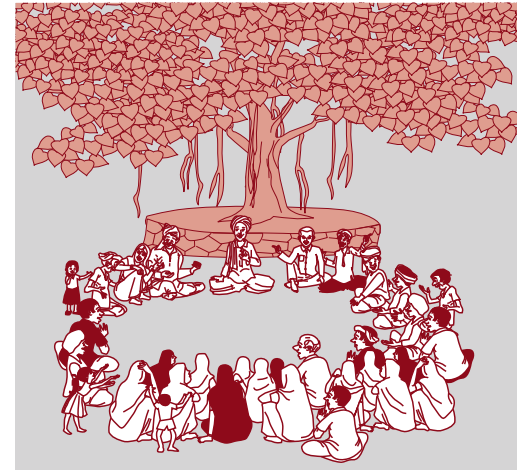
Kamla Ben is a resident of Gaanol Gram Panchayat in Dholka Tehsil, Ahmedabad. Her family consists of five members - her husband and three children. They belong to the community of Scheduled Castes, and their monthly income is INR 8000. Kamla’s husband was the sole inspiration for her to become the Sarpanch in 2009. Her husband himself won the election for the position of the Panch. However, they both were suspended from their positions after six months, accused of having more than two children. The case was dragged for several months. Kamla said that this case was running in District Panchayat. She had to submit birth certificates of her two children as proof, along with a written affidavit from the school that corroborates the same. Kamla says, “All the accusations are false. I have only two children. The other child is the child of my elder sister. After her death, I was married to her husband. So technically, I have two children, while my husband has three.”

She was engaged in this case for three years. Albeit she won the case, the work at Panchayat office was adversely affected. Kamla says that it was because of Talathi that her opponents made false accusations against her. They were against the fact that Kamla contested elections from an open seat despite belonging to the Scheduled Caste. They used this rule to affect the Panchayat’s work, and harassed her mentally.

Samras Panchayat Restricts Role of Women in Panchayat

Introduction

Samras Pachayat takes place when all the village members elect the Panchayat in consensus. In this case, voting does not take place. The Gram Panchayats that build their Panchayat using this method of consensus receive a monetary reward from the state government, as a form of appreciation. As stated by Kannu Bhai from Jaspuriya Panchayat, “Samras Panchayat is conducted in order to maintain peace in the village, and to avoid unnecessary expenditures and conflicts.” On the contrary, Madhu (wife of Kannu Bhai) points out that in such Panchayats, only men of the village become the Sarpanch, and women never get any opportunity to become the Sarpanch or Panch, unless the seat is reserved for their category. Selection of women for Sarpanch’s post is only due to two reasons: either the seat is reserved for women, or they intend to receive greater grant from the government by forming a consensus. Kannu Bhai, however, is of the opinion that open seats are meant for men. Women cannot take these seats, the same way men cannot be selected for seats reserved for women. Kannu Bhai and countless people like him believe that open seats are only for men, and women can only contest elections on reserved seats.



The following three stories from Samras Panchayats reflect upon the challenges women have to face when they dare to participate in elections and work independently. To elect women on reserved seats is only a compulsion, and the influential men of the village do not wish to let go of the power from their hands. For this, they use unwilling women from their households to contest the elections, while the men of the house retain authority, continuing to rule. In such cases, the desire of the policy makers to empower women and help them attain equal opportunities and status fails miserably. Women who are aware and come forward on their own to work for the development of their village are pushed back by the influential people who do not leave any stone unturned to throw women out of power.

Story of Geeta

This story is of Piprala Gram Panchayat located in Bhavnagar. This Gram Panchayat witnessed elections for the first time in 2010 post-independence, only because Geeta, an ASHA worker from the village, wanted to contest elections following the due electoral process. Being an ASHA worker, Geeta is popular among the villagers. During the 2010 elections, the post was an open seat, and Geeta decided to advocate for a proper voting process rather than following the consensus based Samras

Geeta found that since independence, no woman has held the post of Sarpanch in her village. Samras Panchayat is conducted where men get the opportunity to become the Sarpanch, and women only get an opportunity if the seat is reserved for their category. She traced the root cause of the problem to the absence of elections and that none of the women candidates are represented in Samras Panchayat. Geeta decided to break this tradition by contesting the elections.

Panchayat. Geeta participated in the elections, but got defeated by Chandu Bhai Joshi who had already received consensus through the Samras system.

In the village, only a handful of influential people always came together to form the Panchayat with consensus. But in 2010, when Geeta came to know that the same process was going to be followed again to form the Panchayat, she shared with the villagers her willingness to contest elections. Many recommended her not to do so, but Geeta refused to bow down.

She states that Samras Panchayat consists of only those people who are selected by the influential males in the village. These men pay no heed to whether the person is willing to hold the post or not, or if he/she possesses the capabilities to perform the tasks. As for women, they only receive the opportunity to hold the post of Sarpanch in Samras Panchayats, if the seat is reserved for them. But in this case too, the opportunity is limited to women who agree to work in accordance with the will of village heads.

Geeta is a well aware and rational woman. She is associated with a local women's organisation in the village, and has ample knowledge about the procedures and tasks involved in the working of the Panchayat. She realised that since independence, no woman has held the post of Sarpanch in her village. She traced the roots of this problem to the absence of elections and that none of the woman candidates are represented in Samras Panchayat. She decided to break this tradition by contesting the elections. The consequence of going against the traditional procedure was faced by Geeta not only that year, but also during her consequent contesting. She was given a 'motion of No-Confidence' within six months of her victory, and was forced to leave the post.

Story of Madhuba

Mehsana District is located 80 kilometres from Gujarat's capital, Gandhinagar. According to the 2011 census, the village has a cumulative population of 1.84 lakhs. Gram Panchayat Jaspuriya is located in this district's Satlasan Taluka. Jaspuriya Panchayat is a Samaras Panchayat. It consists of three villages: Vasaijut One, Vasaijut Two and Jaspuriya village. Madhuba is a resident of this Panchayat, and is the first woman to be elected for the post of Sarpanch in past 20 years, though this could happen only because the seat was reserved for women in 2017. She belongs to the Parmar community, which is a Scheduled Caste in Gujarat. She has received education till class 8th and has two children. Her husband, Kannu Bhai, is a graduate, and is responsible for distribution of mid-day meals in the village. The household's income is approximately INR 10,000 per month. Madhuba's husband is known for helping villagers whenever required. Madhuba does not have a political background, and was least interested in participating in the elections. She agreed only because Kannu Bhai asked her to. As a result of this, her husband continues to perform all her duties and tasks of a Sarpanch.

Despite this, Madhuba does perform her duties through her husband. In her term, she has been able to get an R.C.C. road constructed (in Vasaijut One and Two), street lights repaired, commission the construction of R.C.C boundary walls in several colonies in Jaspuriya, as well as conduct a cricket tournament for the children of Satlasana Taluka. In addition to her other tasks, she is currently concentrating on getting houses constructed for 30 families spread over these three villages, under Indira Awas Yojana.

Story of Varsha Baa (Alias)

The third story is from a Panchayat named Lajpat Nagar (alias) located in Shihor Taluka in Bhavnagar. Here, elections for the Panchayat have only been conducted three times since independence. Unfortunately, even in these three elections, women never received the opportunity to either contest the elections or hold the post of Sarpanch. Lajpat Nagar Panchayat consists of 890 people, of which approximately 425 are women, i.e. almost half the population. Yet, they have always been deprived of holding the highest post in Gram Panchayat.

In 2018, a woman finally became the Sarpanch of Panchayat, though only because the seat was reserved for their category in the given year. Currently, Varsha Baa is the Sarpanch; and in addition to that, all the eight Panches (members of the Panchayat) are also women, and have been selected through consensus. Of these eight women, only three are literate.

Varsha Baa is 52 years old and has received education till class 8th. Her family owns three acres of farm and, of which they earn approximately INR 7,000-8,000 per month. Varsha belongs to Kshatriya community, and as the village is dominated by the members of this community, most Sarpanches too have been Kshatriyas.

It is only by co-incidence that Varsha Baa got elected as the Sarpanch of this Panchayat. In actuality, her brother-in-law, Praveen Singh (alias), was preparing his wife, Bhanumati Gohil (alias), to contest for the elections. She failed the eligibility criteria, as she has three children. Praveen then decided to put forward Varsha Baa's name for the candidature, and discussed it with the elders of the village. Being childless, Varsha Baa was eligible for the post of Sarpanch. Praveen Singh tried to strategically advocate for Samras Gram Panchayat in the village, as he had very little faith in election results, and was doubtful of her sister-in-law's chances of winning. Furthermore, he was looking forward to receiving extra grants for Samras Panchayats from the government.

Though both Varsha Baa and Madhuba did get selected for the post of Sarpanch through consensus, most of their responsibilities are taken care of by their brother-in-law and husband, respectively. Varsha Baa only took the post of Sarpanch because her family members wanted her to do so. She states that in her community, women are not allowed to go for work outside

Varsha Baa and Madhu Baa got selected for the post of Sarpanch through consensus. Yet, most of the responsibilities are taken care of by their brother-in-law and husband, respectively.

their houses, and in accordance with this tradition, she conducts all her duties and manages the work from her residence itself. The tasks that require her to step out of the house are taken care of by the men of her house. Such situations demand questioning the status of women in Panchayats. Policy makers are making policies for promoting the participation of women in Panchayat, but research still needs to be done on whether they are receiving any opportunity to work independently or not. On the other hand, there are women like Geeta, who are fighting the tradition using the opportunities provided by the government, but are pushed back by the influential men and systems like Samras Panchayat, which do not let a woman hold a position of power.

Oppression Worse than Poor Policies

Introduction

Of the many villages in the state capital Gandhinagar, Roopa Ben Bheekhaji Thakor currently holds the position of Sarpanch in a village called Rachada. She was elected as a Sarpanch in 2017. The Rachada Gram Panchayat falls under the jurisdiction of Kalol Taluka that is 40 km from Gandhinagar. This Panchayat inhabits a total population of 3924, wherein the count of female population is approximately 1100. Roopa Ben, who lives with her husband and two children in the village, is involved in the business of property dealing. This helps her secure a monthly income of INR 15,000. Roopa Ben, who is handling the reputed post for the first time, does not receive any honorarium from the Government. Nobody has been getting any honorarium in Gujarat Panchayats, and Rupa is disappointed with this.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

In 2017, when announcement for the reservation of seats for women candidates was made in the Rachada Gram Panchayat, Roopa Ben's husband, Bhikaji, made her fill her candidature for the post of Sarpanch. Initially, Roopa Ben and her children were not in favour of this step. However, she contested the elections and emerged as a winner in 2017, and since then, she has worked quite hard for the development of the Panchayat. She got water filled for animals in the dried-up pond, and ensured the construction of houses under Indira Awas Yojana. She constructed roads, sewer lines, installed electric poles and water pipeline in the Thakor, Patel and Dalit colonies. However, the last one year has been full of challenges for Roopa Ben as a Sarpanch.

Before she became the Sarpanch, Roopa Ben had worked as a Panch in 2012, when an elected Panch had resigned from the post making it available for re-elections. When the elections were contested, Roopa Ben won unopposed. The current Gram Panchayat in Rachada comprises for female and five male members.

After becoming the Sarpanch, Roopa Ben followed her husband's advice, and involved all the Panch members in the tasks related to Gram Sabha. Her husband, who is well versed with the workings of the local court and the functions of the administration, keeps guiding Roopa Ben. This helps her bring monetary funding for the development of the Gram Panchayat.

Roopa Ben, after becoming the Sarpanch, received one round of training from the Government. The aim of the training was to make her well aware of the responsibilities of a Sarpanch. However, Roopa Ben believes that this one-time training was not quite helpful. Her husband had to guide her at



Roopa Ben

Age:
39 years

Educational Qualification:
Class 10

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Family Members:
4

Family's Monthly Income:
INR 15,000

Source of Family Income:
Property Dealing

Address:
Village Rachada, Taluka Kalol,
District Gandhinagar, Gujarat

every step. She also hired a legal advisor for her assistance, and paid a monthly amount of INR 4000-5000 for his services.

Roopa Ben, on the condition of keeping anonymity, shares the story of a person belonging to a political party, who keeps harassing her mentally in indirect ways. This person is a powerful member of Taluka Panchayat. He has adopted several ways to torture Roopa Ben. One of the ways in which he harasses her is by sending drunk men to her house at night on the pretext of seeking her help. When she asks them to come next morning, they hurl abuses at her. Recently, her husband and son were attacked by unknown people, and her son narrowly escaped death in that incident. When Roopa Ben's family decided to report the matter to the police, they were once again threatened that if they file a report, their son will not be spared. According to Roopa Ben, she is being subjected to such torture to make her resign from the post.

Roopa Ben sates that the males of the opposition party often insult her at public meetings and gatherings, and torture her to make her resign from the post of Sarpanch. She is constantly worried about the safety of her family. She says that the safety of her family is of utmost importance, for which she can leave the post of the Sarpanch.

This is not the sole attempt to break the confidence of a woman Sarpanch. Roopa Ben narrates another incident where efforts were made to insult her by honouring the Panch members at the inauguration of a bank, while completely ignoring her despite her holding the most important post in the village. According to her, this was done on the directions given to the Bank Manager by a Minister through the Taluka Panchayat. She is facing the consequences of being a woman who dares to work freely.

Roopa Ben's husband shares that they, as a couple, have been accused of selling a dried pond to a private builder. Not only were false allegations made, but this false news was also circulated and published via newspapers. Roopa Ben is constantly worried about the safety of her family. She says that the safety of her family is of utmost important, and she can even leave the post of the Sarpanch for that.

Another challenge is at the level of administration. Roopa Ben informed that the Secretary (Talhati) used to take signatures from the previous Sarpanch on blank cheques. Roopa denied following this practice, and that annoyed the Secretary. He started creating hurdles in the process of fund allocation to Roopa Ben's Gram Panchayat. Whenever Roopa Ben would present the budget for development of her village to the District Officer, the Secretary would prove the budget wrong. The state administration, convinced by the Secretary's claims, would sanction the budget only after reducing the grant. The Secretary's job in the Panchayat is to send all the files to the Zila Panchayat Office for further approval, and he is the only one at the Panchayat level to check the validity of the budget.

Roopa Ben desires to work for better education, construction of houses for the poor and finding solutions for water scarcity in the village. She dreams of bringing Wi-Fi facilities to her village, with the aim of improving the quality of education for village children. However, currently the development work is at halt in the Rachada village. Roopa Ben is unable to give her best due to the mental stress she is being subjected to on a regular basis.

Impact of Government Policies

Gujarat government has reserved 50 per cent of seats in the Panchayat elections for women candidates, with the aim of improving their participation in local governance. However, regressive attitude of the society towards women, political equations and corruption continue to break the confidence of women who dare to participate in Panchayati functions. Despite overcoming the challenges of the state policies, Roopa Ben is being victimised by such incidents, and is being forced to resign from her post. It will be no surprise if she becomes a victim of the motion of No Confidence, or leaves her post on her own. It is important to have government policies to ensure the presence of women in PRIs, but what is even more crucial, is to have policies that provide a space for women leaders to work respectfully without being subjected to different forms of harassment.

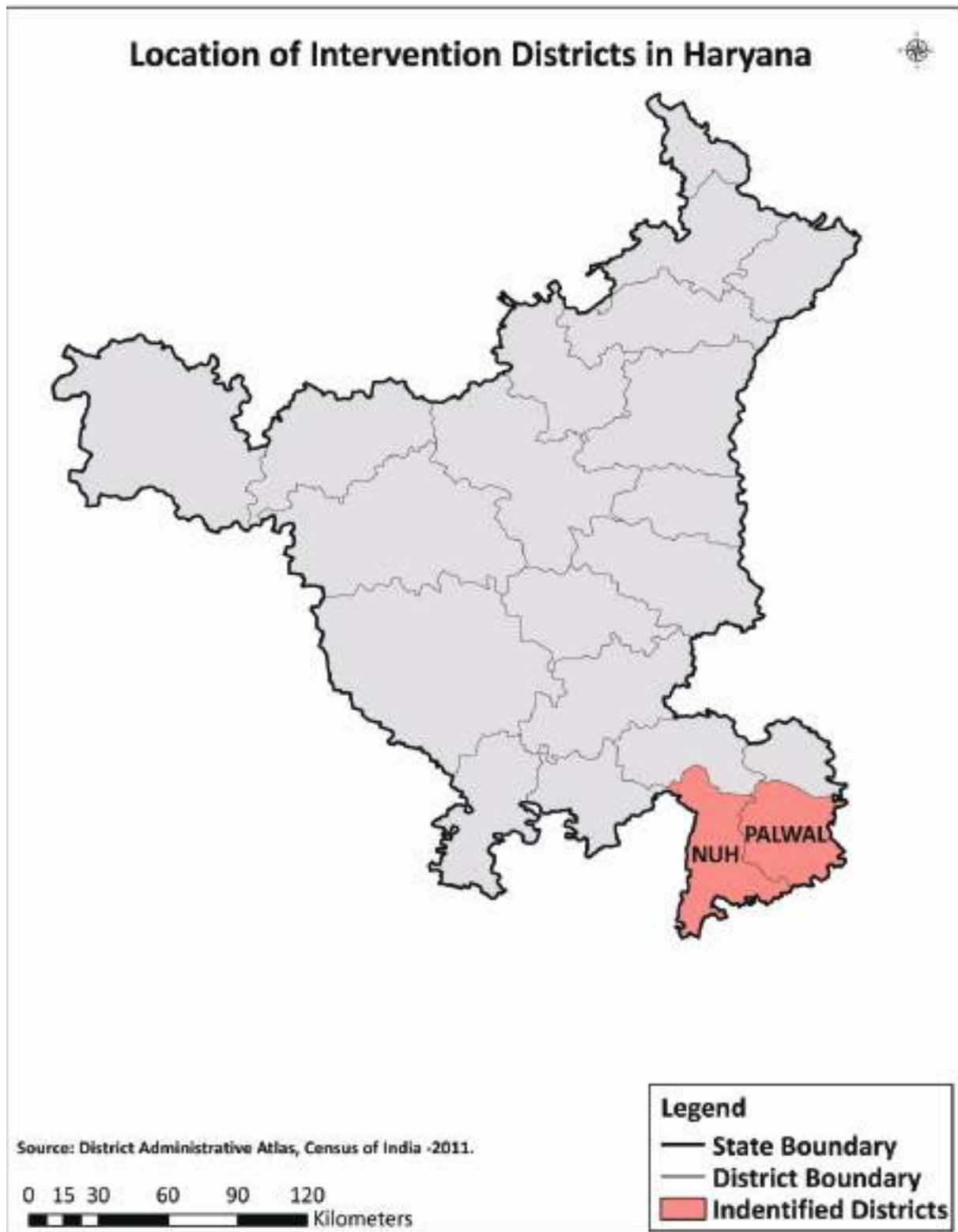
Roopa Ben, after becoming the Sarpanch, received one time training from the Government. The aim of the training was to make her well aware of the responsibilities of a Sarpanch. She believes that one time training is not helpful to successfully carry out Panchayat development work. She took help from her husband to guide her at every step, and also hired a legal advisor to accomplish village level development work.

Case Stories

Haryana



- a. Rules to Contest: Supportive for Some and Restrictive for Some
- b. Illiterate Haleema: More Informed and Responsive than an Educated Sarpanch
- c. Kela Devi's Work gets Appreciated: but she can't become a Panchayat Member
- d. Struggles of Politically Victimised Rajbala
- e. Education Laws that do not allow Contesting Panchayat Elections



Haryana

Haryana state is located in the neighboring area of Delhi (capital of the country) and can be said to be a developed state. On one hand there are developed cities like Gurgaon, while on the other hand are areas like Mewat, which is known for its cultural, social and educational backwardness. Jhajhar district has also been disgraced because of incidents which that happened in the past due to the orthodox mentality of its people (such as honor killing). Haryana has faced defamation because of cases of female foeticide and hence low sex ratio. The main occupation of people is farming and the state is known for its good and advanced agriculture. After independence from Punjab, Haryana has made a very good contribution to economic development but this state is still considered backward (socially, educationally and politically).

At present, Haryana has 21 districts, 124 blocks and 6083 Gram Panchayats. All these 21 districts include 154 cities and towns. The ritual practice and the danger of Khap Panchayats is prominent in this state. Haryana is widely considered for its '*chaudharahat*', which is directly related to men's domination. This gets reflected in many common practices like the trend of unmarried girls not considered for making a voter card (as it is assumed that they will get married and go away and in the mean time there is no need for them to cast votes).

If one thinks talk about the famous campaign, 'save daughter, educate daughter', then it does not seem to have its roots in Haryana. In 2011, from the total population of Haryana, only 75.55 per cent was literate, in which 84.06 per cent were men and 65.94 per cent were women. But in the Panchayat elections held in 2016, the women of Haryana played their best role, 86.5 per cent women voted in Panchayat elections. If we talk about girls being dropped out of schools in Haryana, the percentage of girl drop out is more than that of boys.

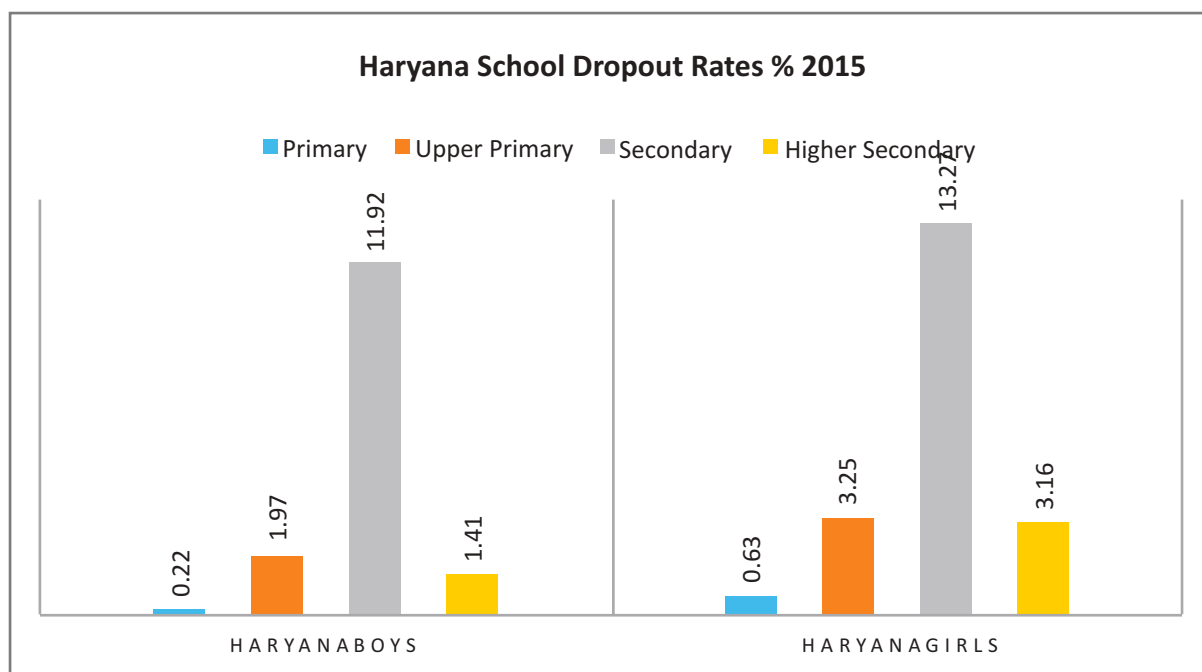
In the Panchayat elections of 2015, due to the rules related to minimum qualification, women had to bear the brunt as 83 per cent of the women coming from Scheduled Castes (above 20 years of age) could not contest the Panchayat elections. Due to the enforcement of this rule, posts of 2067 Panches, 12 Sarpanches and 5 Panchayat Samitis remained vacant in the 2016 panchayat elections.

In India, a total of 20 states have given 50 per cent reservation to women in panchayat elections, while in Haryana it's still 33 per cent. In the Haryana Panchayat elections which were held in 2016, there were a total of 6083 sarpanch posts, of which women got elected for 2022 seats.

In Haryana, for the Panchayat elections, the candidate has to follow these rules, due to which women's participation has been impacted. Mainly the rule of minimum qualification has had a major impact on the participation of women.

Recommendations and Suggestions

- ✍ Incentives play a vital role in ensuring the participation of elected representatives in decision-making. It has been noticed that there are certain very active and enlightened women leaders at all the levels of Panchayats, who have been successfully implementing the developmental schemes and have ensured overall development of their constituencies. Such leaders need to be encouraged by publicising their leadership qualities and honouring them in public meetings. This will certainly encourage other women representatives and ensure replication of such good practices.
- ✍ To give a proper status to women, the Government, media, NGOs, and universities have to play a vital role in this field. The Government should encourage universities towards better research in this field and finding the problems in the implementation of different developmental programmes. The Government needs to work to resolve these problems through adequate policy support. There should be a proper check on the existing and emerging dynamics at the grassroots level for the success of any programme.



- Education rules - For the post of Sarpanch, it is mandatory for a candidate belonging to a Scheduled Caste, or any female candidate to pass 8th class, and it is compulsory for a male to pass 10th class is necessary for the candidate from Scheduled Castes to be 5th standard pass for the post of the panch.
- Toilets - The candidate must have a water-provided toilet in their house.
- Any kind of payment to a Cooperative bank or electricity bill should not be outstanding/due on the candidate.
- Criminal case - There should not be any criminal charge sheet on the candidate in which they are likely to get a ten year sentence from the court.

Right to Contest: Supportive for Some and Restrictive for Some

Introduction

Located in the state of Haryana, Palwal District is 65 kilometres from the National Capital Territory of Delhi. Haryana's proximity to the metropolitan city does not take away from it the image of being a patriarchal society. Violence against women has always been a social truth of the area - honour killing, dowry deaths, female infanticide have been rampant in the state. Amid such milieu, where it is difficult for women to even step out of the house, 38-year old Geeta Devi dared to break the shackles and became a Sarpanch of the Janachauli Panchayat in Palwal. Despite having a modest educational background, this journey for Geeta Devi has not been an easy one.

Geeta has completed her Masters and B.Ed. in three subjects. Her initial dream was to become a teacher and work hard to create a better future for the students of government schools. However, she was equally worried about the miserable condition of her village. She then realised that it is important to be a part of the system for its overall development.

The unsanitary condition of living in villages can be credited to the low levels of education and orthodox thinking. In Janchauli, one can see piles of dirt all around, with people practicing open defecation. Women are not allowed to go out of their houses. Geeta, not ready to accept the situation, took the responsibility of changing it. With complete support from her family, she decided to contest the elections for the post of Sarpanch.

With the understanding that for a comprehensive transformation, it is necessary to work at a political level, Geeta contested for the seat that was reserved for women. This helped Geeta to win the elections. Before Geeta Devi, Ramvati too had won the elections, but the entire work was done by her husband. However, after Geeta won the elections, things started changing. Overcoming all the orthodox practices, Geeta started working independently as a Sarpanch. This not only helped her work efficiently, but also gave her the confidence to change the entire outlook of the Panchayat.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

She worked with complete dedication and brought positive changes in the village. People in Janchauli had been practicing open defecation for several decades. Geeta encouraged and facilitated construction of toilets in every house. She created awareness among the people to use these toilets, and made Janchauli an open defecation free village.

Her dream of working for children was fulfilled, as she worked towards improving the quality of education and brought in contemporary ways of learning in the village school. It was the first time that computers and printers were introduced in village schools. As the village had electricity problems, Geeta got invertors installed in the schools to ensure hassle free learning for children. Geeta renovated the Anganwadi in the village, which



Geeta Devi

Age:
38 years

Education/ Qualification:
M.A., B.Ed.

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Family Members:
6

Family's Source of Income:
Agriculture and Property

Family's Monthly Income:
INR 20,000

Address:
Janachauli Panchayat, Hatheen Block, Palwal District, Haryana

Geeta worked with complete dedication and brought change in the village. She encouraged and facilitated the construction of toilets in every house, and brought an end to the practice of open defecation. She also contributed in ending the practice of Purdah. Now, even the elder women of the village do not practice Purdah. The women of her village believe that the credit for the change goes to their present Sarpanch, Geeta Devi.

was in a dilapidated state. She also worked towards finding innovative solutions for better water management in the village. This helped Janchauli become an ideal village, and was chosen as a Modern Village. The Government also awarded INR 50,000 to Geeta Devi for her commendable efforts and dedication.

Geeta has a unique way of working, which is different from the conventional ways practiced by others. She is one of those Sarpanches in the country, who follow the practice of surprise inspection to ensure that government representatives are following their duties diligently.

As a Sarpanch, Geeta had to face a lot of challenges. Haryana is known for its rigid traditions. For people here, the head of the village or a Panchayat has to be a male, and this rejects the idea of a woman being a leader and giving instructions to men. Hence, working, taking decisions independently and keeping an eye on the functioning was not easy for Geeta. However, she never lost hope and courage, and kept thinking of solutions. She believed that to change someone, a person has to change himself/herself first. To eradicate the practice of the purdah system, she renounced the practice herself. She made a conscious effort to maintain a continuous dialogue with the rest of the women, and to make them aware about their rights. This resulted in women coming together and rejecting the practice altogether.

Now, the elder women of the village too do not practice purdah. Even today, women keep discussing the issue, and have come to a conclusion that the purdah system has been a burden in their life. They sincerely believe that the credit for this change goes to their present Sarpanch, Geeta Devi. It was because of her efforts that they could gather the courage to oppose the system.

Impact of Government Policies

Geeta is grateful to the government for its decision of reserving 33 per cent seats for women in Panchayats. She also welcomes government's decision of introducing the new eligibility rule of minimum educational qualification for contesting the elections. She says that because of these two initiatives, she was able to contest the elections. Firstly, the seat of the village was reserved for a woman, and secondly, she fulfilled the minimum education eligibility made compulsory by the government. It was because of these laws that Geeta was able to become a Sarpanch in a regressive state like Haryana.

Geeta supports the proposed rules by the government for the participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. However, she feels that these rules will also be responsible for reducing the participation of women in elections. With the introduction of this rule, many women have been deprived from taking part in Panchayat elections; while on the other hand, some women, especially the younger ones, will get the opportunity to contest the elections. It is interesting to note here that in Haryana, the eldest woman Sarpanch is just 37 years old.

Geeta Devi has also been a yoga practitioner, and runs free yoga centres in the villages of Palwal, where women are taught the importance of good health.

Illiterate Haleema: More Informed and Responsive than an Educated Sarpanch

Introduction

65-year old Haleema, an ex-panch of Bisru Panchayat in Punhana Block of Haryana, is illiterate. She had won the 2010 elections as an ordinary member, but with her knowledge, she overpowered many. Of the 20-member Panchayat, Haleema was one of the seven women members. Haleema has been a very active member of the Panchayat. She works as a farm labour, collects wood and daubs cow-dung cakes to earn her living. Another source of income that helps her make ends meet is the old age pension that her husband, who retired as a house guard, receives. Her family comprises a total of 11 members, out of which 9 are children. Haleema stays in the village with her two sons; one is pursuing graduation, while the other mostly stays out because of work.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Most of the villagers are of the opinion that Haleema works more than a Sarpanch, and her illiteracy has never been a hurdle. Before becoming a Panch, Haleema was associated with a local organisation that had helped her evolve her thoughts and opinions. With the help of the organisation, she had started working on different issues related to development of the village. This motivated her to not only contest elections, but also emerge a winner. Her experience contributed to her efficiency to work as a Panch.

Haleema had built a reputation as a social worker in the village. Undoubtedly, she faced no difficulties while working as a Panch, as she had already developed an understanding of working with the community. She believes that not all have the capability to express themselves at every platform. In fact, those women who have the intellect and good communication skills not only get the job done, but also, create a respectable space for themselves in the society. Maybe this is the reason that Haleema is a well-known figure in the village, even though she no longer holds a position in the Panchayat. Even today, people in Bisru think of her when they need any Panchayat related information. Sangeeta, a resident of the village, shares that earlier in Bisru Panchayat, there was only one Anganwadi centre for a population of 18,000-19,000. It is because of Haleema's efforts that now there are 11 Anganwadi centres in the Panchayat.

Haleema made sure that the corrupt and inefficient officers were expelled from her Panchayat. She stopped fraudulent activities at the ration depot, and made sure that people get the full quota of their ration. She got a water tank installed in the Harijan Basti to ensure sufficient water availability; and in addition to that, she also got them a food storage tank at a discounted



Haleema

Age:
62 Years

Educational Qualification:
Illiterate

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Family Members:
11

Family's Source of Income:
Labour

Family's Monthly Income:
INR 2,500-3,500

Address:
Janachauli Panchayat, Bisru Panchayat, Punhana Block, District Nuh, Haryana

Haleema is not in favour of making minimum educational qualification compulsory for contesting the Panchayat elections. According to her, to work in a Panchayat, knowledge is more important than education. By citing her own example, she says that the absence of knowledge restricts a person and binds him/her. Haleema is scared of the newly formed minimum education policy that might restrict participation of deserving candidates like her.

rate of 75 per cent. During her tenure, she also accomplished an important task under the Swachh Bharat Mission - with the help of the Sarpanch, she got INR 4,600 released for 400 people, as the first installment for starting the construction of toilets. Even though she is no longer a Panch today, she got the assistance of INR 12,000 for 25 people to start constructing toilets under the Swachh Bharat Mission.

She ensured the participation of women in village meetings. Usually, women are not allowed to attend the meetings. At the same time, women themselves do not see any benefit out of attending such meetings. Haleema went from door to door and spoke to women and their family members about the benefits of attending village meetings, and ensured an increase in the number of women participants.

Haleema surveyed the need for toilets in the village. Bisru is a highly populated Panchayat, and even today, has a problem of open defecation. Haleema has put in efforts for the amount received by the village health nutrition and sanitation committee to increase to INR 3,000. She also made sure that the food distributed under the Mid-Day Meal and Anganwadi scheme is hygienic and of good quality. She also ensured the availability of all necessary health services in the village.

Bisru Panchayat is no different from the other areas of Mewat that suffer from the issue of water scarcity. For this, Haleema created awareness on water harvesting system, and collected INR 50,000 from the village. With this money, she got a rain water harvesting system installed in the village. This helped to reduce the problem of water scarcity, drastically. She also facilitated the release of old age pension for 40 senior citizens.

Impact of Government Policies

Haleema worked all day and night towards the development of the village during her term as a Panch. She wanted to work harder by contesting for the post of Sarpanch in 2015 elections. Unfortunately, she could not, as she did not fulfil the minimum educational qualification criterion.

Haleema is not in favour of making the educational qualification compulsory for contesting the Panchayat elections. She sees herself as a big example for this. According to her, to work in a Panchayat, knowledge and experience is more important than education. She says that the absence of knowledge restricts a person and binds him/her, and that education is not a base of knowledge. She is scared that because of the new rules, people might just misuse their educational status to win the elections against deserving people.

Kela Devi's Work gets Appreciated: but she can't become a Panchayat Member

Introduction

Nuh Mewat is one of the most backward districts of Haryana, where eighty per cent of the population belongs to the Muslim community. Kela Devi resides in the Raipur village Panchayat of Punhana Block in Nuh Mewat. 42-year old Kela Devi is not a part of any official position in her Gram Panchayat of Raipur, but has worked intensively for the empowerment of women, voluntarily. The population of Panchayat is 3500, with approximately 48 per cent women. There are two Aanganwadis in the village.

Kela Devi has completed her education till class five from Jurhedi village in Bharatpur district of Rajasthan. She belongs to a Scheduled Caste family, and had moved to Raipur after her marriage. Kela Devi works as a labourer, while her husband earns his livelihood as an expert mason, and together they are able to earn a monthly income of INR 4,000-5,000. Understanding the importance of education, Kela Devi is working hard to ensure that their children get proper education and become independent. She wants her children to contribute to the development of their village and country.

Kela Devi does not practice Purdah. She has participated and won in various sports competitions organised in Nuh and Punhana against the wishes of her elders. Kela is against all the practices that inhibit women from showcasing their talent and chasing their dreams. She encourages her daughters to participate in sports events.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Kela Devi has created her own identity in the village, owing to the confidence and courage she has. Her work in the last decade has not only focused on the betterment of women, but also against the marriages of minor girls and towards the education of girl child. The village Sarpanch, Iqbal, says that Kela Devi is a meticulous and hardworking woman who does not require any assistance to do work, and she does what she thinks is needed to be done. In 2010, when a few seats in the Panchayat were reserved for women candidates, Kela Devi stood as a candidate for the post of Panch, but could not be selected due to the caste dynamics and division of politics in the village. Yet, she kept on working on women issues and towards solving other problems of the village. Her village, with a population of 3,500, has only one ration shop, in which ration was disbursed once every six months. Kela Devi raised her concern over the issue, and got the frequency of the distribution of ration increased. According to the residents of Raipur, at present, the ration is made available to them at least once in two months.

To ensure that the illegal and evil practice of child marriage is not followed in her village, Kela Devi discussed the issue with the village women. She even carried out a rally in the village with the support from the villagers. In the rally, she informed the villagers about how early marriages are harmful. Kela



Kela Devi

Educational Qualification:
Illiterate

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Family Members:
7

Family Occupation:
Labour (Far, Labour and Expert Mason)

Family Monthly Income:
INR 4,000-5,000

Population of Panchayat:
3,500 with approximately 48 per cent women

Aanganwadi in the Village:
Two

Address:
Village Raipur, Block Punhana,
District Nuh, Haryana

Kela Devi has created her own identity in the village, owing to the confidence and courage she has. Her work in the last decade has not been focused just on the betterment of women, but also against marriage of minor girls and towards the education of girl child.

Kela Devi says, "The government has nothing to do with whether I can read and write, all they care about is if I can prove it." She questions if this legality is only operational at the Panchayat level, or is the rule also followed at the level of Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha. She says that rules should be equal for everyone.

Devi's efforts are the reason why Raipur village has witnessed a steady decline in the number of minor marriages. She is determined to remove this problem from its core.

These days, Kela Devi is working with the Sarpanch to solve problems at the village school. The school is facing shortage in the number of teachers, which they are working towards. They are trying to increase the level of education provided in Raipur village from class 8th to class 12th. Kela Devi keeps an eye on all the facilities that the village population receives, and if she finds a problem in the mechanism of the provision, she promptly starts working on it. The village Anganwadi is one such example, where she noticed that no work was done. Kela Devi complained about the issue and got the Anganwadi shifted inside the school. This ensured that the Anganwadi kept functioning properly, as the school principal and the teacher could now oversee the operations.

The trend in the village is such that the education of the girl child belonging to Muslim families and Scheduled Caste families is quite low. For this reason, Kela Devi has been continuously going from door to door, talking to the families of these girls so that they can be sent to school.

Impact of Government Policies

In the last election, she wanted to contest for the post of Panch in the Panchayat once again, but due to the new regulations applied by the government, she could not participate in the election process. The village of Raipur follows a tradition of selecting their own uncontested representatives. They do this to maintain the harmony in the village. This tradition was kept intact last year as well, and the villagers had put forth Kela Devi's name for the post of Panch. However, she could not contest the elections, as she did not have the passing certificate of class 5. Following this, Kela Devi suggested her sister-in-law as a candidate to be a member of Panchayat. This suggestion was honoured by the villagers, and therefore, her sister-in-law was made one of the four women Panches that were to be elected.

Kela Devi says, "the government has nothing to do with whether I can actually read and write; all they care about is if I can prove it." She questions whether this legality is only operational at the Panchayat level or the rule is also followed at the level of Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha. She says that rules should be equal for everyone.

She feels that to prevent electricity theft, it is valid to get the bill paid; and to stop the criminals, a proof paper from the police station is a correct procedure. She adds that in the rural areas, the education scenario of women is not that great. There are a lot of hurdles that arise in the journey of a girl's education. She elaborated an incident in her neighbourhood, where a girl was not allowed to go to school by her father after her mother passed away, and now she is not able to study after 10th. This indicates that be it out of helplessness or a particular situation, there are a lot of instances where a girl is not able to study. This impacts her whole life in different areas and ways. It keeps becoming a hurdle, limiting her development in various fields. Unfortunately, the generation to which Kela belongs, is marred by this situation badly.

Struggles of Politically Victimised Rajbala

Introduction

Mewat district is a part of Haryana, where women are still struggling for their rights and basic respect. In this area, women have to face hardship even to get a proper place in the society. Rajbala is a Sarpanch who fought against all odds and gave a reply to her enemies. Today, the villagers are proud of her and have great respect for her.

Rajbala is the Sarpanch of Shahpur Panchayat in Mewat, Haryana. Shahpur is a Panchayat of three villages - Shahpur, Kheda Kala and Badopur. The population of the Panchayat is 1,300-1,400, of which the count of women is 500. Rajbala was an ASHA worker before contesting the elections of 2015. Even today, she works as an ASHA worker, as well as leads the village as the Sarpanch. Rajbala's husband had passed away, and she is the only earning member of the family. She earns a monthly income of approximately INR 11,000.

Since Rajbala's husband passed away, she had to shoulder the responsibility of taking care of her family members. Rajbala has four members in her family, and in order to arrange at least two meals a day, she has to toil day and night.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

In the tenure of two years, Rajbala did a lot of developmental work for the village. In all the villages in the Gram Panchayat, concrete roads were constructed and water availability was ensured. She started a system of pension for the handicapped and widows, and also started a movement against the Purdah system. She worked hard to change the existing mindsets of people towards education for girls, and was also able to get many girls enrolled in schools.

After being the Sarpanch for two years, Rajbala's candidature was cancelled, as she was accused of providing fake education certificates. These allegations were generated against her by Birmati, who was one of her close competitors in 2015 Panchayat elections. Without proper investigation of the issue, the police was on the verge of arresting her. She somehow managed to escape at that point of time, and then reported at the police station the next day with the required documents. Rajbala had to work hard to arrange for her class 8th certificate from the DO office and her school, in order to prove her innocence in the court.

According to Rajbala, all this happened to her because of the equation she shared with her competitors of the Panchayat, and the action she took against the local ration depot. The decision of the court was in Rajbala's



Rajbala

Educational Qualification:
Class 8

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Members in the Family:
4

Occupational Status of the Family:
ASHA worker and Sarpanch

Monthly Income of the Family:
INR 11,000

Address:
Village Kheda Kala, Tehsil Jhirka
Ferozepur, Nuh District (Shahpur,
Kheda Kala, Badopur)

Population of Panchayat:
1300-1400

Population of Women:
500

favour, and she got her seat back. With the case being fought in the court, the Panchayat was deeply impacted for six months, and that took a toll on the pace of development of the village.

Rajbala became a victim of the political dynamics and the patriarchal system that existed in the village. With her relentless hard work and courage, she could win back her respect and position in the village. Under Rajbala's plan for development of the village, come the construction priorities at a school till class 12th, a stitching as well as a tailoring centre for women and a health centre.

According to Rajbala, due to all this conflict, she could not work properly for almost two years, as she was not able to focus on her work. In fact, the problem that was created by others just to harass her, had actually impacted the work and development of the village.

Rajbala is unhappy with the criterion of minimum education level for women to contest the Panchayat elections. She says that had the education criterion not been implemented in the state PRI elections, her opponents would have had no other basis to harass her. According to her, the present situation of education of a woman is a combination of a lot of factors, which is not under their control.

Impact of Government Policies

Rajbala is not at all satisfied with the criterion of minimum education level for women who contest the Panchayat elections. Rajbala further adds that if this education criterion had not been implemented in the state PRI election, her opponents would have had no other grounds to harass her on. According to her, the present situation of education of a woman is a combination of a lot of factors on which they have no control. However, all repercussions of this policy have to be faced by women. Preventive actions will anyhow be taken against them even if they are not responsible for those situations. She says, being educated is definitely good and leads to being empowered, but just having education is not everything - a sense of understanding and 'willingness to do good work' is equally important.

At the end, Rajbala says, "why is this rule not applicable in the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections? These members are also representatives of public, and they also have to work for the public. Why was this rule implemented only in the Panchayat elections, where there are already problems like unavailability of schools, teachers, less exposure among communities on education, existing class and caste dynamics and so on." It seems fully logical under such circumstances that if the government wants only educated women, they should first work on providing basic facilities and infrastructure, work on qualitative aspects to enhance the need for education, and also set such rules as per the age bracket of the candidates.

Education Laws that do not allow Women to Contest Panchayat Elections

Introduction

Raniyala Firozpur Panchayat is situated 40 kilometres from district Nuh of Haryana, and Panchayat Hamjapur lies in its close proximity. Both the Panchayats come under Jhirka Firozpur block. Two women from these Panchayats wanted to contest the Panchayat elections, but could not, as they did not fulfil the new eligibility criteria of minimum educational qualification.

In the region of Nuh Mewat, where the social status of women is already low as compared to men, this new law of minimum education made things worse for them. Where on one side, women already have to fight just to live with dignity, Haryana Government has come up with the law where a person who has not completed class 10th will not be allowed to contest for the Panchayat elections, thus making the fight of women more challenging. As per the 2011 census, the literacy rate of women in Haryana is 68 per cent, whereas in Mewat, the literacy rate is 37 per cent.

Bunty is a 30-year old woman who belongs to the Raniyali Ferozpur Gram Panchayat, and belongs to 'Other Backward Castes'. Bunty is an illiterate woman, but knows how to take care of her family that consists of her husband and three children. The population of Raniyala Firozpur is 1700, out of which around 900 are women. The Panchayat comprises of 11 members, out of which 8 are males. Bunty's husband, Suresh Baldari, is a labourer, and the sole breadwinner of the family.



Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Bunty shares that in the last Panchayat elections, the Panchayat seat of her village was reserved for women from Scheduled Castes. Bunty wanted to contest for the post of Sarpanch, but the new eligibility criteria restricted her from it. According to Bunty, being an illiterate has snatched away her opportunity to exercise her democratic right. She raises a very pertinent question - is an illiterate person not a human? Our Constitution gives all the citizens a right to equality, so on what basis is the government discriminating?

Bunty says that the trend these days is that no one employs an illiterate person. She says that education is important and people should get educated. She does realise that education is crucial for a normal living, but is it really necessary for becoming a Panch or a Sarpanch? She is doubtful of the capabilities of an educated Sarpanch. She asks, "Are they all doing proper and positive work?" She mentioned about Deepika, who was elected as the Sarpanch, but the actual Sarpanch was her husband, Mahender. Deepika herself never went anywhere. According to Bunty, in

many matters, Mahender went to the extent of signing official documents on behalf of Deepika.

As a response to the question that what would she have done first had she won the elections, Buntty said that first and foremost, she would have worked to provide water connection in each house, because women face a lot of problem on this front. Then she would have got toilets constructed. Women do not attend the Gram Sabha meetings, so she would have motivated them to attend the meetings. The reason why women refrain from attending these meetings is because they want to avoid the quarrels that take place between men. Because of these factors, the problems of women are not addressed in the meetings. According to her, the patriarchal society does not want to empower women, and the Government rules further add to the problems.

The next story is of Kulshum, who lives in Humjapur Panchayat, which is in the same Ferozpur Jhirka Block as Raniyala. This was the first time we met someone in the hospital, instead of her house. Kulshum is an ASHA worker, and was sitting outside the Manikheda hospital in Ferozpur Jhirka, along with fellow ASHA workers protesting for the increase in their honorarium.

Kulshum's village has a population of almost 1800, with approximately 600 women. She is 26 years old, and has been living in this village for the past 12 years, with her husband and five children - one daughter and four sons. Kulshum has never received formal education from a school, but can read by joining letters. In the 2015 elections, Kulshum wanted to put forth her candidature for the post of Sarpanch, but was not able to do so because of the minimum education regulation. At present, the Panchayat at Hamjapur consists of eight Panch - three women and five men - and is led by the Sarpanch Shahid, who has studied till class 12th.

Kulshum says that as an ASHA worker, she has served people tirelessly, and this is the reason why wants to win the post of the Sarpanch, so that she can help people more efficiently. Unfortunately, she could not achieve her goal, as she does not have her passing certificate of class 10th. Talking about the work she has done as an ASHA worker for the village, she mentioned how she helped villagers get access to benefits of government schemes, by helping them with the ration cards and widow pensions. It was due to her efforts that the village now has a middle school (earlier it was a primary school). She always ensured that pregnant women in the village get all the benefits provided by various government schemes. Kulshum was also instrumental in arranging for an amount of INR 11,000 and INR 22,000, respectively, for two families under the Kanyadan Yojna.

According to her, most of the villagers still practice open defecation, and that needed attention. Her desire is to have a high school in the village, for which the orders have already been passed. However, she says, it is due to the Sarpanch's passive attitude that the work has not yet started. Further, she feels that the village should have one more transformer, as the one at present is not sufficient. She also wants to bring transparency to the work of

ration depot where currently, the responsible person does not provide proper ration to the villagers, and also does not upload the names of the beneficiaries online.

When asked what, according to her, holds more importance - being experienced or being educated - she responded that for all this work she does not require a formal education. She believes that illiterates work from their heart, and have the zeal to actually work; and no power in this world can stop such people from fulfilling their targets.

While talking about the regulation of having minimum compulsory education for the Panchayat elections, she answered that she is unable to understand as to how come no such rule is made for eligibility for political participation at higher levels (as in the case of ministers), and as to why these rules are targeted to people like them who are working at the grassroots level.

Kulshum also said that she is well aware of the fact that in Gram Panchayat meetings, members of all the committees - B.D.O as government representative and all the Panch - should be present alongside the Sarpanch, but this does not happen in practice. She adds that in her Gram Panchayat, under the rule of the present Sarpanch, a woman Panch has no say, and they are completely neglected.

Impact of the Government Policies

Kulshum says that she never went to school, but today, because of her will power, she knows how to read and write in Hindi. She says that if she can do this with her will power, why can she not work as a Sarpanch? While speaking about the responsibilities of the Sarpanch, she says that she is well aware that a Sarpanch gets a budget for the construction of roads, renovation of wells, construction of toilets and installation of water tanks. She further says that it is the responsibility of the Sarpanch to conduct the Gram Sabha meetings, for which the villagers should be informed in advance. The Sarpanch should get houses built for the homeless, should make sure that the mid-day meal distributed in schools is regularly monitored and properly allocated. According to her, if she knows the roles and responsibilities of a Sarpanch, then why can she not work as a Sarpanch as well?

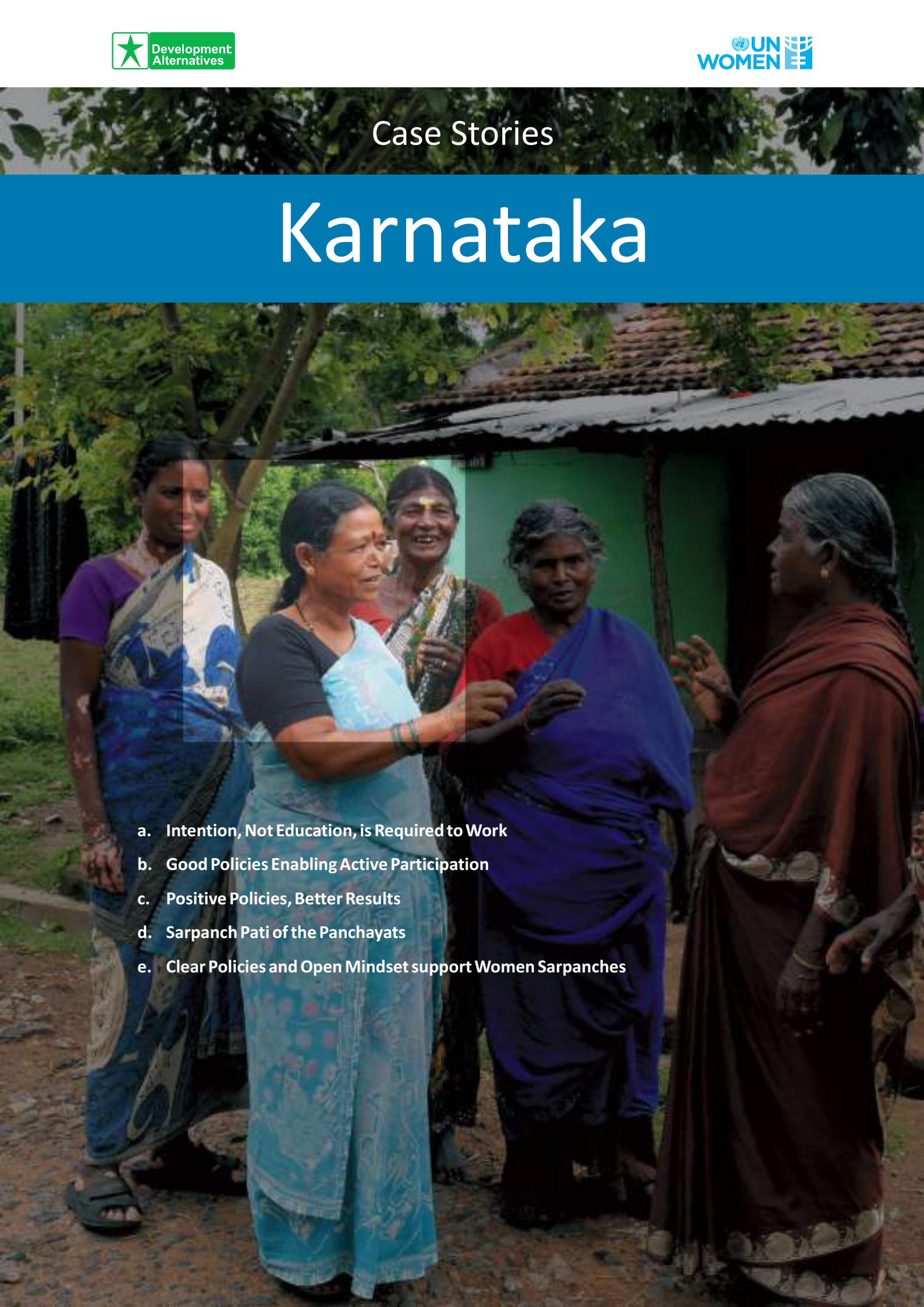
Even Bunty feels the same about the rule of minimum education. According to her, this rule of minimum education has been introduced to prevent the empowerment of women. Rejecting the logic behind the new rule, Kulshum says that to become the leader of the village, it is more important to be well aware of people's needs (development issues) and the government provisions. The new rule of minimum education is affecting many women in places like Mewat. The Government has further suppressed many women by passing such new rules as minimum education, in such regions where the literacy level of women is already so low.

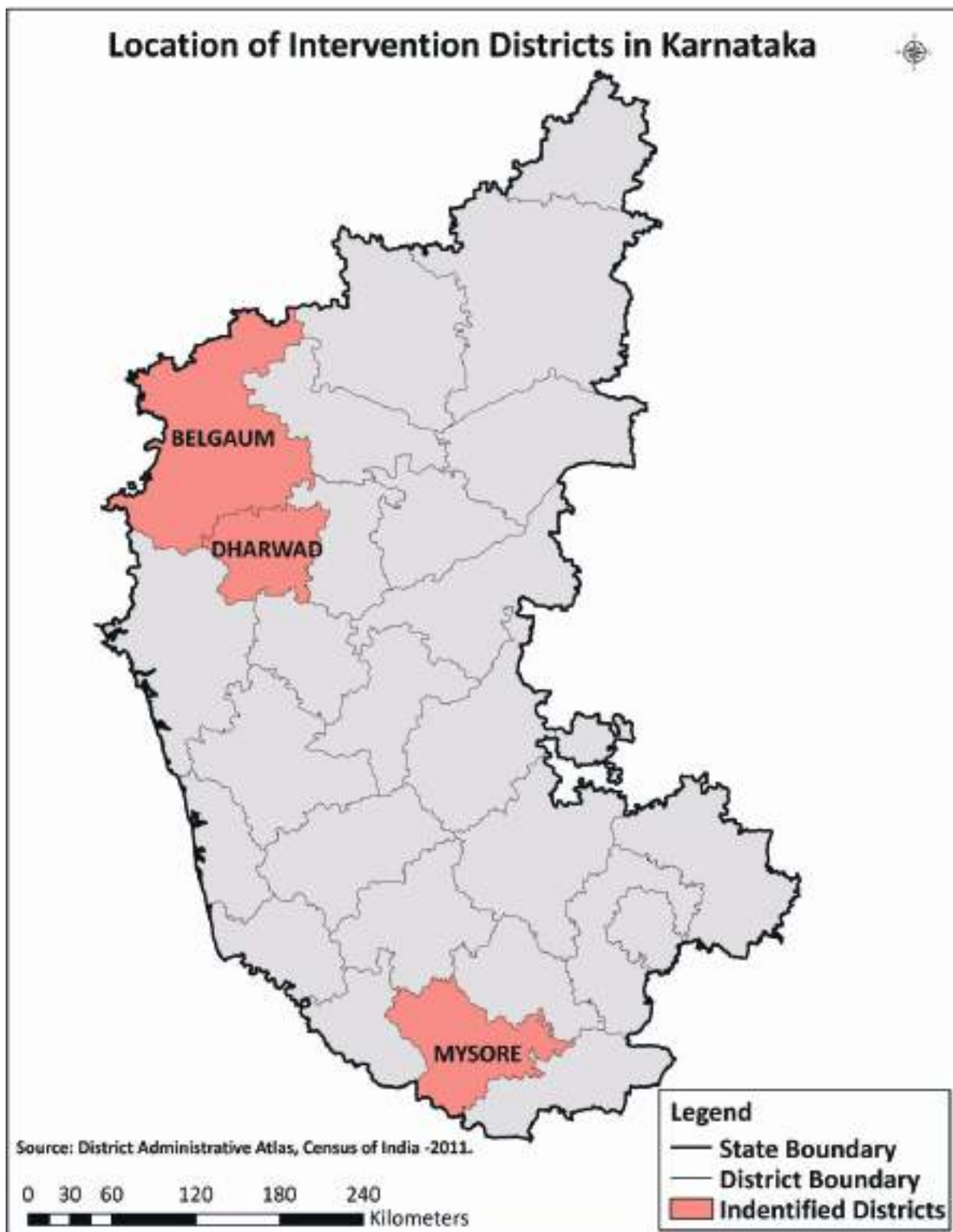
Kulshum believes that for village development work, she does not require education. She believes that illiterates work from their heart, and have the zeal to essentially work. And no power in this world can stop such people from fulfilling their targets.

She questions the implementation of such rules that are specifically targeting people working on the ground.

Case Stories

Karnataka

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- a. Intention, Not Education, is Required to Work
 - b. Good Policies Enabling Active Participation
 - c. Positive Policies, Better Results
 - d. Sarpanch Pati of the Panchayats
 - e. Clear Policies and Open Mindset support Women Sarpanches



Karnataka

Karnataka is a state in the south western region of India. It was initially known as Mysore, and the name was changed to Karnataka in 1973. It is the seventh largest state in India in terms of area, and eighth in terms of total population.

Contrary to the belief that the Southern part of India is very progressive, many superstitious beliefs have been found to have strengthened their roots in the South. In many temples of Karnataka, a clear notice board has been placed that menstruating women are barred from entering the premises. The reason is the superstition that during menstruation, women are impure and unclean, and are thus not allowed to go to such places.

In spite of these beliefs, the level of education in South India is found to be high. According to the Census 2011, 75.36 per cent of the population in Karnataka is literate, of which 82.47 per cent are males and 68.08 per cent are females. Though the state has good literacy levels, unlike other states, Karnataka has not implemented the rule of minimum education for Panchayat elections. Because of this, women with no formal education also participate in the Panchayat elections along with educated women, and they are also seen to be doing good work in their respective Panchayats.

In 2016, there were 95,307 elected Panchayat members in Karnataka, out of which 50,892 women were elected as Elected Women Representatives (EWRs). In terms of women participation in Panchayats, 53.40 per cent participated in PRI elections held in 2016, of which 6.84 per cent women were selected as Sarpanches.

At present, in Karnataka, the candidate has to follow these rules to contest in Panchayat elections:

- Non-Confidence motion letter - If two-thirds or more of the Panchayat body wants to remove any elected person from the post, they can give a non-confidence offer letter and get them removed after two years.
- Any kind of payments to Cooperative Bank or electricity bill should not be outstanding/due on the candidate.
- Criminal case - There should not be any criminal charge sheet on the candidate by which he/she is likely to get a ten year sentence from the court.
- Toilet rule - Although there is no such rule of toilet in the Karnataka Panchayat elections, the candidates are anyway asked to give an affidavit.

Recommendations and Suggestions

✍ It is evident that men's attitude towards women's entry into politics has begun to change from that of total rejection to neutral or limited encouragement, and in some cases, even to active encouragement. This trend needs to be strengthened through orientation courses for communities and other stakeholders, including both males and females. The feeling of equal partnership of women and men needs to be inculcated through social and political awareness among both sexes.

There are agencies (CBOs) and individuals in villages who are open-minded and have a development perspective. Such agencies and people could be identified by PRIs and other government stakeholders, and entrusted with the tasks of orienting, training, encouraging, organising, mobilising and guiding the elected women representatives and communities in general.

✍ Elected women Sarpanches and Panch should be given at least two years' time (if they are being targeted by the norm of 'No Confidence Motion'), since it has been observed during the study that women who take decisions on their own get removed from the post by the males of the Panchayat, using this norm.



Intention, Not Education, is Required to Work

Introduction

Mandihal Gram Panchayat in Dharwad Taluka consists of four villages - Naagalaavi, Mandihal, Warvanagalavi and DaddiKamalaapur. Sita Anand Kamble is a 46-year-old illiterate woman who heads the Mandihal Gram Panchayat, and lives in Naagalaavi village of Dharwad Taluka in Dharwad District in Karnataka.

Karnataka ranks 23rd in literacy among all states in India. According to the 2011 population census, the total percentage of literate population in Karnataka is 72.13, comprising 69.72 per cent males and 55.12 per cent females. This would have certainly changed after 2011; however, the older generation of women that is still illiterate, does not consider education to be an obstruction in their way of becoming a part of the mainstream. Sita, who has been an active social member of the village, is a perfect example of this. She would interact with all the villagers, irrespective of the community they belonged to, and would listen to their problems. This is the reason she became the head of the Mandihal Gram Panchayat in 2015.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

In 2015-16, Sita became the Panchayat head for the first time. The seat was reserved for women candidates for that year. Sita had contested the elections for the post of Panchayat head in 2010 as well, but had lost. After that, she got more involved in social work. A few of her contributions include activities like protesting outside the Panchayat Bhawan for construction of road and footpath, getting older school buildings in the village renovated after raising the issue at the District Court.

Geographically, all three villages in this Panchayat are located near the boundaries of a jungle, which creates all kinds of problems for the villagers. Fulfilling basic necessities like water requires villagers to walk for almost a kilometre. With her efforts, Sita was able to provide each village with a bore well.

With the help of Stree Shakti Sangathan, an organisation for women empowerment, Sita helped 100 women in the village to get cylinders at subsidised rates. Sita got so popular that she was consulted for all works related to development of the village. Her dedication and efforts were appreciated by the villagers. They suggested that she contest the elections.

As per the village people, Hasan was the village head before Sita, who had not done any development work for the village and had wasted all the funds. During the elections, he did try for negative campaigning by stating that, being a woman, Sita would not be able to do any work and will be a failure. This belief, however, was already negated by Sita through her work. According to Sita, during Hasan's term, the government fund was used for personal benefits rather than for development of the village. Sometimes, funds were also returned because they were not utilised. Sita says that she



Sita Kamble

Educational Qualification:
Illiterate

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Members in the Family:
10

Occupational Status of the Family:
Farm Labour

Monthly Income of the Family:
INR 10,000

Address:
Mandihal Gram Panchayat,
Dharwad District, Karnataka

had even raised a complaint against Hasan, because in 2015-16, he sat next to the polling ballot violating the law. He was then arrested by the police. Sita had managed to win the elections, dealing with all these shenanigans thrown at her by Hasan.

Although Sita had no intention of contesting the elections, she was convinced by the villagers who wanted to see her as the head. Initially, her family did not support this decision, but with time, she found immense support from her family members. However, there were a few groups in the village that did not support the idea of Sita being the head.

Despite understanding her responsibilities well, and with all good intentions to work, Sita faced discrimination within the Panchayat. Sita, being an illiterate, hired an assistant to help her. She paid him from her personal income to manage her work smoothly. He became her advisor, and asked her to be careful while signing the papers. Initially, she was afraid to talk to officials, but now she has a lot of self-confidence and is able to converse well with officials.

In her tenure, Sita has been relentlessly working for village development. She has got around 175 toilets constructed, and has enabled regular drinking water facility at the school. Sita regularly organises sessions with women of her Gram Panchayat to discuss about their problems and provide practical solutions. According to the villagers, Sita also organises 10-12 meetings in a year. For these meetings, she puts up notices wherever possible. The Panchayat members, along with the Panchayat secretary of respective wards, notify villagers of their respective wards. These meetings are ways to assess the development work in the village. Whether it is a problem related to water, construction of roads or distribution of ration, Sita ensures that in her tenure, everything works efficiently.

Impact of Government Policies

Sita Kamble has created substantial impact, and is now regarded as a successful Sarpanch. There is a will in her, to learn and work. In the future, she wants to contest elections for Zila Panchayat. She can easily do that, as no such rule inhibiting participation of women in mainstream administration has been applied in Karnataka. Candidates like Sita, who are not even capable to write their own name on the nomination form, are at this position only because the populous of the Panchayat appreciate the work they do. Sita and her husband both are illiterate, yet this does not create an obstruction in her development work, and this forms the base of her leadership. Villagers understand this very well, and have chosen her as their leader. Sita says that had there been restriction related to minimum education for Scheduled Castes in Karnataka, she would not have been able to reach so far. Just like other states, a literate woman would have been in her position, despite having all the support she has earned through her good work.

Sita says that women participation in elections of Gram Panchayat should increase. According to her, women work much more when given proper support, whether it is to prove a point to themselves or to the government or public. Sita does not want to stop here. She wants to go till the District and Taluka level. She has the confidence to work at these levels. This is because she is confident of people's support for her at every step.

According to the villagers, the previous head of the village had not done any development work. It started only when the villagers convinced Sita to become the head of their village. She, being an illiterate, worked hard for the village development, and established herself as a strong leader. She now wishes to contest the election for Zila Panchayat.

Good Policies Enabling Active Participation

Introduction

Karnataka's Mysore district is known for its Mysore Palace that shines as bright as the moon. The literacy rate in the district is average, but unbalanced. The literacy rate in 2011 was at 78.46 per cent. The literacy rate of women in the district was recorded at 67.06 per cent, which is low as compared to men. The biggest reason behind this difference is the fact that girls and women in villages are not encouraged to study.

57-year old Vasanthamma is a resident of B. Matakere Haidi Panchayat located in the Sarguru Taluka in Mysore district. She had contested the elections to be a member of Panchayat in 2015, when the seat was reserved for women belonging to Scheduled Tribes. Vasanthamma belongs to Betta Kuruba Caste that falls under the category of Scheduled Tribes. Vasanthamma has completed education till class 4th. After winning the elections, she became a part of the Panchayat that consisted of 12 male and 12 female members. Her husband continued their family occupation of working in the agriculture fields. Her son, Gudswami, is a driver by profession. Her family consists of seven members. The annual earnings of the male members of the family is INR 2 lakhs, which takes care of the household expenses. Vasanthamma receives an honorarium of INR 500 from the government.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Despite having no formal education background, Vasanthamma has worked dedicatedly for the development of her village after becoming a member of Panchayat. She has completed the construction of 80 per cent toilets in Ward No. 2 of her village. Additionally, she has ensured that land is made available to almost every destitute family in the village, through her efforts. In future, she wishes to work for the development of Adivasi area in her village, as she believes that these areas lack basic amenities. The Adivasis belonging to her village have to walk several kilometres to fetch water, and 20 per cent population of the ward practices open defecation.

Vasanthamma, for the benefit of students, arranged for funds for the construction of a hostel at the Ambedkar Residential School and the Ashram School. She also got the village school renovated. Vasanthamma is also associated with a Self Help Group that works towards the economic empowerment of women folk. The group consists of 15-20 women who collect money and provide loans to each other without any interest. Vasanthamma plays an important role in keeping the group members together and in the effective functioning of the group.



Vasanthamma

Caste:
Kuruba, Scheduled Tribe

Educational Qualification:
Class 4

Marital Status:
Married

Family's Occupation:
Farming

Family's Annual Income:
INR 15,000

Address:
B. Matakere Haidi, Sadguru
Taluka, Mysore, Karnataka

Vasanthamma has worked dedicatedly for the development of her village. Despite having no strong education background, she ensured efficient working and progress of every development project on field.

There are no specific conditions for participating in Panchayat elections. Many women feel encouraged to come forward and contest the elections after the announcement of 50% seat reservation for women.

Vasanthamma does not want any hurdle to come in the way of her village's development, and to ensure that, she regularly participates in the Gram Panchayat meetings with other Panchayat members. This helps her to understand the problems faced by the villagers. She inspects the progress of every project by visiting the sites regularly, which makes her a people's leader. She always finds complete support from the villagers. She believes that there is a lot to be done for the development of her village. Making the village open defecation free by completing the construction of toilets, and building houses for the poor sections of the society, are on her priority list. She also wants to get a stage built in the school.

Vasanthamma shares that initially she wasn't too keen on contesting the elections. She was convinced by her SHG and fellow villagers to contest. Her husband and son were also convinced that she should stand for the elections. Her son helped her fill the nomination form, and attached all the necessary documents that were required. While filing the nomination, she had attached documents related to house tax, water tax, caste certificate, etc. As her son helped her with the procedure, she faced no hurdle in filling the form. She says that the presence of just one educated person in the house can be really helpful to people like her who are less educated. It was with her family's support and motivation that despite being just class 4 pass, she was able to contest the Panchayat elections.

Impact of Government Policies

There are no specific conditions for participating in the Panchayat elections. Many women like Vasanthamma can participate in the elections. Moreover, after the announcement of 50 per cent reservation for women, many women feel encouraged to come forward and contest the elections. Vasanthamma is a living example of it. She says that Karnataka Panchayat elections never had difficult procedures that would have restricted participation of people with less education. Besides, she just had to inform if she was using a toilet in her house, and if not, all she had to do was give an undertaking stating that she would construct a toilet in her house within one year of winning the elections.

She further affirms that even other documents that were required during the time of elections could be easily arranged by a candidate. Moreover, there were no restrictions like a particular document has to be submitted by the candidate only, which further simplified the process. Anyone from the family could do it, and that is one of the reasons Vasanthamma was able to file her nomination. She says that had the government decided to restrict participation on the basis of education, she would not have been able to participate in the elections.

Positive Policies, Better Results

Introduction

District Dharwad is a relatively progressive district when it comes to literacy levels and cleanliness campaigns. As per the 2011 census, the literacy rate of Dharwad Taluka in Dharwad District is at 72.13 per cent. The literacy rate for men is at 69.72 per cent and for women is at 55.12 per cent. The total population of Narendra Panchayat is around 14,000, out of which 48 per cent are females. Currently, 82.47 per cent of the total population uses toilets in Karnataka.

Sushila Shetty Patil is the Sarpanch of the Narendra Panchayat in Dharwad Taluka. She holds the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (equivalent to Class 10th). She is 47 years old, and her family consists of her husband and three children. The major source of income for the family is agriculture and the salary she gets as Sarpanch. One of her sons is in the Indian Army, and the family is able to generate a total income of INR 20,000 per month.

Sushila has been the head of Narendra Gram Panchayat since 2010. Earlier, her father was also the head of the Gram Panchayat. Sushila won the election of Sarpanch in 2010, and again in 2015. In both the years, the seat of the Gram Panchayat was reserved for female candidates belonging to general category. It was Sushila's parents, her husband and other elders of the village who motivated her to contest the election of Sarpanch. Being a daughter of the village gave her an upper hand. Her husband helped her during the election campaigns.

Sushila had not been living an easy life before she became the head of Narendra Village Panchayat. Like many other women, she has had to face several difficulties. Sushila used to live with her in-laws, but because of her husband's addiction to alcohol, and she facing domestic violence, she left her in-laws' place and came back to live in Narendra village. After around two years of separation, her husband also came to Narendra village, and settled here.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Sushila has always been an active social worker. In 2003, she formed a Stree Shakti Committee and started bringing people together. Later, through this organisation, people started receiving social benefits.

Sushila helped getting gas cylinders at subsidised rates for women of the village. She also provided interest free loans to women who needed financial support. It is because of her dedication towards the welfare of villagers, that she became a renowned figure in the village, especially among women. Currently, the Stree Shakti committee has 150 women members.

Sushila says that she is the daughter of the village, and has not faced any difficulties despite being a woman. Maybe this is the reason that she has



Sushila Patil

Educational Qualification:
10th

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Family Members:
5

Source of Income for the Family:
Agriculture and salary of Sarpanch

Monthly Income of the Family:
INR 20,000

Address:
Narendra Panchayat, Dharwad Taluka, Dharwad District, Karnataka

been heading the Panchayat for the past three terms, working with utmost positivity and energy. Sushila says, the villagers of Narendra Panchayat are well aware, active and have information on the existing schemes and rules & regulations. They question the Sarpanch if the funds released are not utilised appropriately.

Sushila had to face a lot of difficulties when she was elected as Sarpanch for the first time. She was new and unaware of the functioning of the Panchayat. Things got worse when suddenly four Panchayat Development Officers of her Panchayat were transferred. This put Sushila in an extremely difficult situation. At that moment, other members of the Panchayat came forward and helped Sushila in understanding the functioning of the Panchayat. Later, a new Panchayat Development Officer was appointed, and along with the officer, Sushila undertook several activities for development of the village. It included repairing of roads, provision of drinking water, provision of drainage pipes, improving the education system in schools, etc. Sushila is also trying to get roads and a community hall constructed for the entire village under the 'Suvarna Yojana'.

Sushila keeps conducting Panchayat meetings at regular intervals, which are attended by all Panchayat members. The agenda of the meetings is to identify Wards which need special attention. Along with this, discussions are also held on various topics. It is after this process that funds are released for the identified work.

Besides organising emergency meetings to solve the problems of the villagers, Sushila also conducts general meetings and Gram Sabhas. A general meeting is held every six months in the Narendra Gram Panchayat, which is attended by all villagers. The meeting is also attended by officials of various departments. The villagers put forward the difficulties faced by them, to which viable solutions are provided. Some problems are solved on the spot. The Sarpanch plays a vital role in the meetings. The village got its tax collector after Sushila was elected as Sarpanch. Sushila says that the amount collected as tax is utilised for the development of the village.

Impact of Government Policies

In the policies of the Karnataka State Panchayati Raj Institutions, there are neither eligibility criteria like minimum education, having a toilet or a limitation on the number of children, nor systems like Samras that prevent many motivated women from contesting the Panchayat elections. The Panchayati Raj Institutions in Karnataka reserve 50 per cent seats for women candidates, which helps women enter into the mainstream politics. The literacy rate in certain parts of Karnataka is higher than many of the Northern Indian states. This is one of the reasons women are living with honour and dignity here, and women like Sushila can work freely. Sushila says that if this state too had rules such as having only two children to be eligible for contesting the elections, she would have never got a chance to contest the elections. Such all-inclusive policies of the government have made it easier for women like Sushila to participate in the mainstream political system. Sushila wishes to further elaborate her political journey by contesting the Taluka and District Panchayat elections. She is hopeful that people will support her, and the government will pass no such policies that will cause hindrances in her journey.

Sushila says that had the state implemented the rule of having only two children to be eligible for contesting the elections, she would never have got the chance to contest the elections. Such inclusive policies of the government have made it easier for women like Sushila to participate in the mainstream political system. Sushila wishes to further elaborate her political journey by contesting the Taluka and District Panchayat elections.

Sarpanch Pati of the Panchayats

Introduction

Since the decision of reserving seats for women candidates in Panchayati Raj System has come to play, the participation of women in Panchayat elections has increased. With this welcoming step, other than the increased participation of women, a new post of Sarpanch Pati (husband) has emerged. Under the disguise of helping inexperienced Women Sarpanches, their husbands are using this to snatch from their hands the power and their right to work. The state of Karnataka, known to be a progressive state in context of Panchayat elections, is also not totally untouched by such stories.

Story of Mahadevi Chaugule

Mahadevi Chaugule is 47 years old, and has attained education till class 2nd. Currently, she is working as the Vice-President of the Vantamuri Panchayat in Belgavi Block of Belgaum District in Karnataka. Mahadevi had won the elections in 2015-16. She resides in a village called Buthramanti, with her family that includes her husband and three children. She belongs to the Other Backward Classes (OBC). Mahadevi's husband had also been a member of the same Panchayat in 2010.

The total population of Vantamuri Panchayat is 9730, of which 5092 are males and 4638 are women. A total of nine villages (New Vantamuri 1, Butarmati, Sutgati, Halbhavi, Bhoomnati, Upkad, Purankod, Mallihod and Parbinati) fall under this Panchayat, in which there are 31 Panchayat members, of which 14 are men and 17 are women.

Mahadevi's husband, Chaugule, is the perfect example of a 'Sarpanch Pati'. According to him, Mahadevi is not much educated, and is unable to read documents related to Panchayat. This is why he does all the work, be it related to administration or development – Mahadevi is only the face, whose duty is to put her signatures on paper. All the work is done by her husband.

Mahadevi's story is one of such stories where she was not keen, or even ready, to participate in the Panchayat elections. Her husband convinced her to participate. He collated all the required documents and filed her nomination form. Mahadevi won the elections, but instead of training her by providing information related to the functioning of Panchayat, her husband took all the power in his hands and excluded her completely.

Mahadevi was able to share information related to very few schemes of the Panchayat, but it was her husband who shared the entire information related to schemes regarding drinking water, toilet construction, road construction, etc. He also described how all these activities/tasks are done,



Mahadevi's story is one such story where she was not keen, or even ready, to participate in the Panchayat elections. Her husband convinced her to do so. It was only her husband who shared all information related to schemes regarding drinking water, toilet construction, road construction etc.

and how grants are taken from the senior authorities. He interacts and gets all the work done from the officers and other officials. As Mahadevi is not well aware of the schemes, she feels hesitant while speaking with officers.

Story of Farzana Dastageer

Mahadevi's story is one of the many stories of Sarpanch Pati in Karnataka, as there are many such stories waiting to be heard. Another aspect of this tradition is reflected in the story of 50-year old Farzana Dastageer Mulla, who is the current Sarpanch of Shabandar Gram Panchayat located in Hukkeri Block of Belgaum District. She is the president of this Panchayat.

Shahbandar, Chikaldinni, Gejpati, Taalbhave, Hospet and Gutguddi are the six villages that form the Shabandar Panchayat. The total population of the block is 6890, of which 3411 are males and 3479 are females. This Panchayat has a total of 21 members, of which 11 are men and 12 women.

Farzana resides in the Shabandar Gram Panchayat. She belongs to a family dominated by men, where all decisions taken by the men of the family is followed as a practice. Farzana somehow managed to complete studies till class 10th, but was then married to Dastageer Mulla as soon as she turned 18. Today, her only role is that of being a mother to five children, and looking after them.

For the last 15 years, Farzana has been winning the post of president of this Panchayat. Her family has been actively involved in politics for the last three generations. From the last three sessions, the seat of Shabandar has been reserved for women candidates, and Farzana has been the president in all these three terms. Hailing from a political background, Farzana has some knowledge of the functioning of Panchayat, but she does not do any work related to Panchayat. As a regular practice, it is only her husband who looks after the Panchayat. Farzana is unaware of the election process or any information related to nomination. Her husband fills her form and completes all paper work.

Farzana wants to actively contribute to the development of the village, but is often limited by her husband's influence. However, Farzana is not completely heedless, as she has basic knowledge of issues related to Panchayat. She informs that 150 toilets have been constructed during her term as President. The decisions are taken in consultation with all members of Panchayat and the Panchayat Development Officer.

Farzana, in her 15 years of being a President, has taken part in many social programmes, but has never spoken at any of the events. It is not that she does not feel like putting forth her thoughts, but she lacks confidence. This is the reason why the presence of her husband is considered more important than Farzana's in social meetings. The villagers have also accepted the fact that the actual work will be executed by Dastageer, and that Farzana is just the 'Sarpanch' for namesake.



Another story is of Farzana, where she belongs to a family that is dominated by men, and all decisions are taken by the men of the family.

Deepa and her husband have no knowledge of schemes, programmes and political affairs related to Panchayat. In this situation, they have no option but to follow the advice of friends on issues such as how to utilise the grant received by the Panchayat.

Story of Deepa Shivappa

27-year old Deepa Shivappa, a resident of Birnauli village, is the vice-president of Islampur Panchayat in Belgaum District. This Panchayat has three villages – Birnauli, Islampur and Old Vantamuri. The total population of Islampur Panchayat is 4720, of which 2351 are women and 2375 are men. There are 21 members in the Islampur Panchayat, of which 10 are males and 11 are females.

Deepa, who belongs to the Scheduled Caste (SC), has completed education till class 2nd. She lives with her husband, father-in-law and mother-in-law. The recent elections had seats reserved for female candidates. Although Deepa was not interested in contesting the elections, her husband pressurised her to file the nomination, and she won the elections. Deepa, who hails from a family of farmers, has no knowledge of politics and functioning of Panchayat. Her husband is an illiterate, who has no knowledge related to government schemes and other development work. Both of them have to consult their friends to seek guidance for proper functioning of Panchayat.

Deepa shared that before winning the elections, she was confined to her house. Since she entered the realm of politics, she keeps getting the opportunity to participate in social programmes. However, due to lack of confidence, she is unable to gather courage to speak at such events. She and her husband have no knowledge of schemes, programmes and political affairs related to Panchayat. In such a situation, they have no option but to follow the advice of friends on issues like how to utilise the grant received by the Panchayat. This, many a times, leads to complete ignorance to the development priorities of the villagers.

This situation is not restricted to only Belgaum. Many places in India suffer due to the same situation. Although the government has announced that there should be equal participation of women in administration, there is still a lot to be done for this dream to turn into reality. If continuous efforts are not made, and adequate resources are not timely invested, women will be used just as a face by the male members of the society, thus failing the purpose of formulating such policies.



This situation is not restricted to Belgaum only. Many places in India suffer through the same situation. Although the government has announced that there should be equal participation of women in administration, there is still a lot to be done for this dream to turn into reality.



Clear Policies and Open Mindset support Women Sarpanches

Introduction

This is the story of Sridevi Bhimmappa. Sridevi belongs to Belur Gram Panchayat in Dharwad Taluka of Dharwad District. Educated till class 5th, Sridevi is the member of Belur Panchayat of Ward No. 5. This is her second term as a member, and in both the terms, she won the elections on the seat reserved for the Scheduled Tribe. She lives in a family of four, which comprises her husband, a son and a daughter-in-law. The annual income of the family is approximately INR 2 lakhs.

The total population of Belur Gram Panchayat is 4000, of which the female population is 1800. Yallappa Kadli is the head of this Panchayat. The Panchayat consists of 16 members, with equal number of men and women members. Hegkari and Neralkatti villages come under the jurisdiction of Belur Gram Panchayat.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Sridevi was elected as a Panchayat member for the first time in 2010. During her first term, she worked with total dedication for the development of the village, and that was the reason she got elected the second time as well. Sridevi is in her second term as a Panch, and is well aware of the functioning of Panchayat.

In 2015, the seat of Belur Panchayat was reserved for Scheduled Tribes. This was the reason Sridevi opted to participate in the elections. She says that there is no eligibility criteria of minimum education for Panchayati Raj elections in Karnataka. This gave her an opportunity to participate in the elections. After winning the elections for the second time, Sridevi continued to work towards development of the Panchayat, which made her popular in the village.

Sridevi was a little uncomfortable and scared when she contested elections for the first time. She thought that she could never understand the functioning of the Panchayat, as she is just class 5th pass. But soon after winning the elections, she started taking interest in the work; and as a result, street-lights were installed, facilities like homes for poor and water for irrigation were provided. She has been working effectively after winning the elections. While we usually keep hearing of instances of interference by male members in the functioning of Panchayat and their atrocities on women, no such incidence has been reported in the Belur Panchayat by Sridevi. She says that she has never faced any opposition from the villagers or the male members of the Panchayat.



Sridevi Bhimmappa

Educational Qualification:
Class 5

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Family Members:
4

Family's Source of Income:
Agriculture

Family's Monthly Income:
INR 17,000

Address:
Belur Panchayat, Dharwad Taluka,
Dharwad District, Karnataka

Sridevi was elected as a Panchayat member for the first time in 2010. During her first term, she worked with dedication for the development of the village, and that is the reason she got elected for the second time as well. She is happy that there is no eligibility criterion of minimum education for Panchayati Raj elections in Karnataka, which gave Sridevi an opportunity to participate in the elections.

When Sridevi won for the second time, roads and water shortage were the two major problems that Ward No. 5 was facing. To solve these issues, Sridevi made persistent efforts to meet the Panchayat Development Officer, and kept visiting the Panchayat Office. As a result, she solved both the problems before the end of her first term. Sridevi is thankful that no one, not even the opposition party, ever criticised her way of working. According to her, women are respected in the village. Sridevi regularly organises and attends meetings to discuss the development of the Gram Panchayat.

In these meetings, the Panchayat members discuss various problems being faced by the village, and for each work, an approximate budget is decided. Sridevi says that only the Panchayat members attend these meetings. The unique thing in this Panchayat is that no male member from the family of women Panch members is allowed to attend these meetings. This gives women the freedom to freely put forward their opinion, without any interference. This has given a boost not only to the development of village, but has also empowered women in a strong way. Sridevi wishes to contest the next Taluka elections. She is hopeful that she will win the election, and will continue working for the development of the village.

Impact of Government Policies

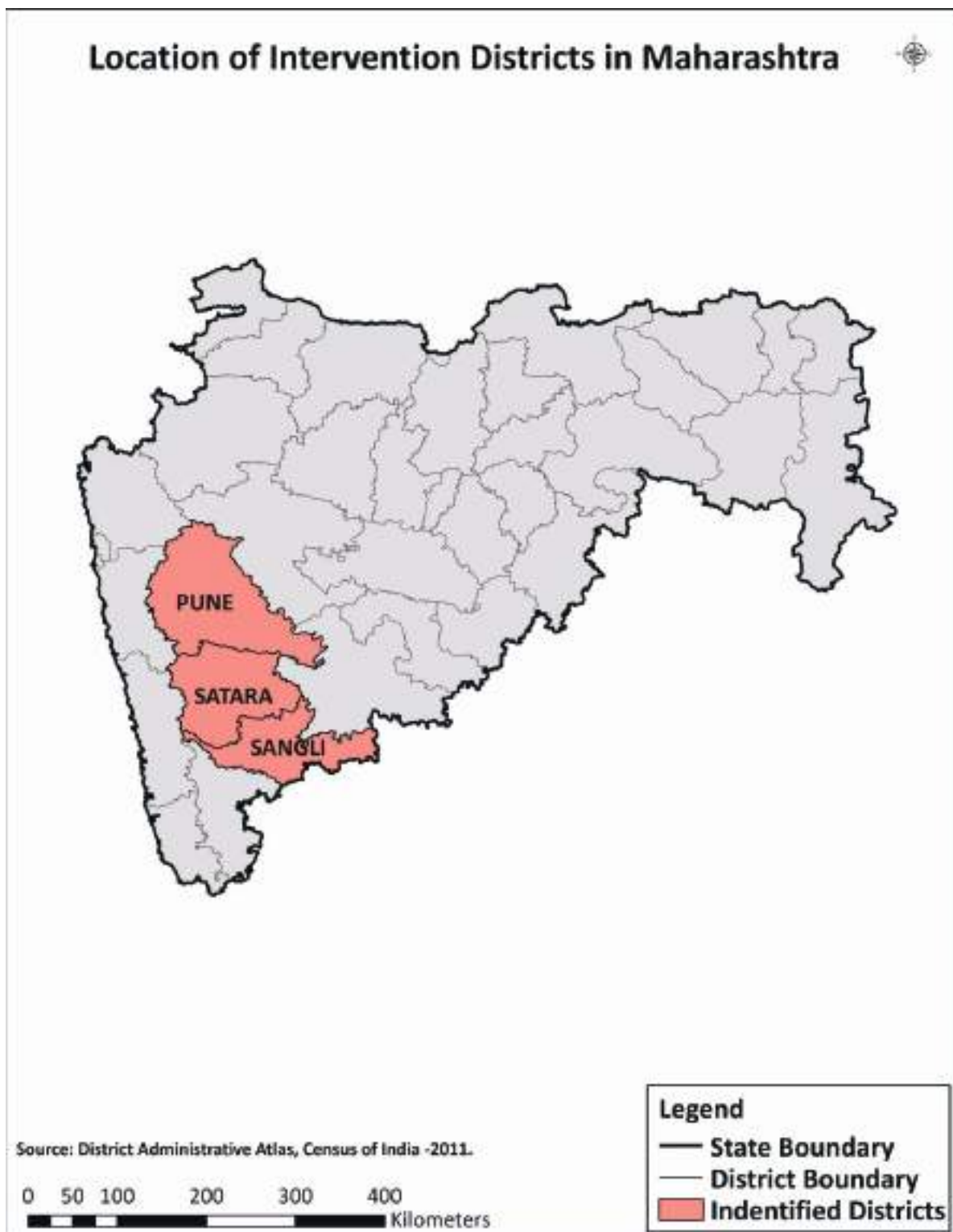
Despite having attained education only till class 5th, Sridevi can still dream of participating in the Taluka elections. And not just Sridevi, but many other women like her can also do the same, as under the Karnataka Panchayati Raj Election Act of 1993, there is no such criterion of minimum education or of having a toilet for the person filing his/her nomination. It is a different matter that if the contesting person does not have a toilet at home, he/she has to take an oath to construct a toilet within one year of getting elected, or else his/her seat can be withdrawn. This rule is stated in the Part J of Section 12 of Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act of 1993. There is also no such rule of having a maximum of two children to be eligible to participate in elections, which usually prevents many women from contesting the elections.

Case Stories

Maharashtra



- a. Education is Must for Sarpanch
- b. Sangeeta: An Innocent Victim of Policies
- c. On the Way to Development... Despite the Hurdles
- d. Lack of Education does not mean Lack of Interest
- e. Women as Sufferers: Politics of Policies



Maharashtra

Maharashtra is located in the western region of India. It is considered among the richest states of India. The capital of Maharashtra is Mumbai, which is popular as one of the largest cities of India and the economic capital of the country. Pune (sixth largest city of India) is also counted as one among the major metro cities of India, and is famous as the education hub of the country.

Maharashtra is one of the major states in the country, which plays a significant role in the country's gross domestic product. Maharashtra is currently contributing 25 per cent of the gross domestic product of the country, in which Mumbai is at the forefront.

Maharashtra is spread across 3,07,713 square kilometres, comprising 36 districts. In 2011, the sex ratio of Maharashtra was 929 females per 1000 males. Maharashtra's literacy rate is 82.34 per cent, of which 88.38 per cent are men and 75.87 per cent are women.

At present, 50 per cent reservations have been made for women in Panchayat elections in Maharashtra. Currently, a total of 2,03,203 members have been elected in Panchayat elections in Maharashtra, of whom 1,01,466 are women. In Maharashtra, if we talk in terms of the percentage of elected women, it accounts up to 49.93 per cent.

On July 4, 2017, the Maharashtra Government presented the 2016 Maharashtra Social Boycott Act. This rule restricts any social exclusion imposed by the people of the Panchayat or the group of people. By doing so, Maharashtra has certainly become the first state in the country that has come up with such a rule, but as far as the ground reality is concerned, Maharashtra is totally different.

A 19-year old Kavita Meghwal and her family have to stay away from their village for a year, because Kavita has married a boy of her own choice. Kavita has repeatedly requested the Panchayat to allow her family to stay in the village, but the Panchayat stated that they can return to the village only on the condition that they pay a sum of INR 5,00,000 to the Panchayat. Kavita has also lodged a complaint regarding this to the police, but they have not yielded.

This one incident gives an idea about the status of women in Maharashtra. The situation of women at the Panchayat level is even worse. In the Panchayat elections of Maharashtra, women have to face great difficulty, along with various racial and patriarchal constraints. They are neither accepted easily (if elected), nor allowed to work easily. The situation of girls in terms of education is also not good. The dropout rate is high, and perhaps, the government is not even concerned about it.

Recommendations and Suggestions

✍ **For tackling the problem of the entry of disinterested women through reservation of seats in Panchayats, a process needs to be set for the identification and preliminary orientation of deserving candidates who could be persuaded by the communities to contest elections. It will certainly provide an opportunity to women possessing better educational attainments, leadership qualities and interest in carrying out social welfare work in their Panchayats; otherwise influential men will push their wives and relatives to become post holders even if they are least interested and ill prepared.**

✍ **The curriculum for the students at the primary, secondary and higher secondary levels of different courses, like mass communications and social sciences, needs to include aspects of governance, its meaning and its possibilities (specifically with a gender lens), so that they can relate to it and see roles for themselves to meaningfully contribute.**

In Maharashtra, around 6 per cent girls drop out from the Middle School, mainly because of lack of separate toilets for girls in nearly 36 per cent of the schools. Maharashtra Government has announced a fund of INR 42,000 crores for various schemes in the state, but there is no fund available for the maintenance of toilets in government schools.

Despite this situation, the state government has kept the condition of 7th class pass for all castes and all posts in the Panchayat elections, which is an injustice in itself. This clearly shows that the state lacks proper understanding of the prevailing social conditions, and is making rules without getting in touch with the ground realities.

In Maharashtra, the candidate has to abide by the following rules if she/he has to contest for Panchayat elections:

- The rule of two children - The candidate should not have a third child w.e.f. 2001, otherwise he/she cannot contest.
- Toilet rule – The candidate's house should have a toilet, and if not, it is necessary for him/her to use a toilet (even if that of a neighbour's), and for this, the candidate has to give an affidavit.
- Rule of education – The candidate should be 7th class pass to be eligible for the post of Sarpanch and Panch, irrespective of whether he/she belongs to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe or the general caste.
- Any kind of payment to Cooperative Bank or electricity bill should not be outstanding/due on the candidate.
- Criminal case - There should not be any criminal charge sheet against the candidate, by which he/she can be sentenced for ten years by the court.

Education is Must for Sarpanch

Introduction

This story is of Jyoti Kale - the Sarpanch of Jachak Vasti Panchayat of Indapur Tehsil, which falls under the District of Pune in Maharashtra. According to the 2011 Census, the total population of Jachak Vasti is 1261, out of which the female population is 574. The total literacy rate in Jachak Vasti accounts for 73.67 per cent, whereas for women it is 66.03 per cent.

Jyoti belongs to a poor family of a backward community. She lives in a family of four, including her mother, father and a brother. The major source of income for the family is farming. In total, 10,000 sq. metre, i.e., 1 bigha farming land is owned by the family, which helps them earn a decent living to manage a year's expenses. Her father is a farm labourer. Through both the sources, they are able to generate a monthly income of INR 15,000-20,000. Jyoti, being a 29-year old, is already playing the role of a leader in Gram Panchayat. She has attained education till Masters of Arts, and has also received training in B.Ed. Before getting appointed as a Sarpanch, Jyoti worked as a teacher in the local school. She aspires to work in the administrative services, and is preparing for the same. Simultaneously, she is also managing the responsibilities of a Sarpanch.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

In the 2015 Panchayat Elections, seats were reserved for women belonging to backward communities. Jyoti had been the most educated among all women in the village. The entire village persuaded her to participate in the elections. They believed that Jyoti, being a literate, would dedicatedly work towards the development of the village. Believing in the trust that the villagers showed in her, Jyoti participated in the elections. "I did not have money or any political influence. Education solely became the reason for my victory in elections", shared Jyoti after she won the elections.

Since Jyoti is educated and is preparing for administrative services, comprehending the official work of the Panchayat was not a challenge for her. Moreover, the village secretary, Devkante, also assisted Jyoti in understanding and handling various tasks at Panchayat level. Jyoti works hard to garner support from all stakeholders – Government officials in the form of grants, and positive & supportive attitude from all co-workers. She utilises her knowledge to get the work done, whenever she gets stuck.

Bringing participation of women in various committees is a big challenge. In the beginning, Jyoti noticed that women never participated in the meetings she called. She then started interacting with the women folk to encourage and make them vigilant about how conditions of the village as a whole can be improved with their participation. She made them realise how important they can prove to be for achieving their village's growth. Gradually, women started attending meetings and putting forth their views and insights.



Jyoti Kale

Age:
29 years

Educational Qualification:
MA, B.Ed.

Marital Status:
Unmarried

Number of Family Members:
4

Professional Status:
Farming, own 1 Bigha farmland

Family's Monthly Income:
INR 15,000-20,000

Address:
Jachak Vasti, Indapur Tehsil,
District Pune, Maharashtra

Jyoti has to give a lot of time to the Panchayat. When she is asked, “What would it have been like had she been married?” she replies, “Yes, it is tough to look after the family and work as Sarpanch at the same time. From this perspective, being unmarried, I am able to concentrate more on work and studies.” “Education gives us power, efficiency of understanding the work and taking decisions accordingly. Probably this is why I feel self-sufficient about handling the work related to Panchayat. I am pretty much aware of everything happening around, and I take rational decisions”, adds Jyoti.

This is why Jyoti is also a strong advocate for setting minimum educational qualification for the position of Sarpanch. She says, “I agree that to get involved into Panchayat, being educated to a certain level is required. Education is Strength.” A long list of development work has been undertaken by Jyoti over her three years of working. She facilitated construction of sewer lines in the village for proper drainage of water, and got the pipelines repaired. Making the village free from open defecation was a great achievement for her. Now, she has taken up the task of converting the primary school of the village into a Smart-School with all necessary digital equipment.

Usage of digital signature on all documents of Panchayat has been initiated. She provides employment in the Panchayat through e-tenders, and facilitates all the payments online. Jyoti shares that she could do all this because she is educated. Had she been uneducated, she would not even have known about various technicalities and facilities, or she would have had to rely on others. To enhance and promote community participation, Jyoti also organises awareness programmes.

Unfortunately, in the society we live in, there is no such work that goes unopposed, especially in the case of women. It is an ordinary assumption that without the fall of character, no woman can move forward. Jyoti, however, is very courageous. She laughs at people who question her character, especially when she goes out of the village or when she does something commendable. She says, “My parents trust me and that is enough for me. For any woman, the path of growth is full of hurdles. People can say whatever they want to, I do not care.”

Jyoti believes that reservation is a big opportunity for women to move forward. It has brought many women into the mainstream. Women should take full advantage of it, and should ensure maximum participation, so that the aim of the policy can be attained. She gives her own example, “Had Jachak Vasti not reserved seats for women, I too would not have become the Sarpanch. With the help of this available opportunity and education, I got this position.”

Jyoti is not willing to contest for Sarpanch in the next election, believing that there are many other options available for her. This opportunity must be grabbed by those women for whom it has been created; and they ought to be empowered, for which they must hold the position of Sarpanch and/or Panchayat member.

Jyoti says, “I agree that in order to get involved in the Panchayat, being educated to a certain level is required. Education is Strength.”

Impact of Government Policies

Jyoti possesses all qualities that are required to be a candidate for the position of Sarpanch. For the post of Sarpanch, along with the application form, she had to submit all the required certificates. For criminal record clarification, Jyoti had to extract a character certificate from the police station. Apart from this, she also had to mention that the toilets at her home were clean. An Education Certificate also had to be submitted with the application form.

In Jachak Vasti, during elections, a lady candidate, despite not having a toilet at home, had falsely claimed of having it and filled the nomination form. Jyoti preferred not to disclose her name, but said that contesting elections with false claims is wrong, and protested her participation. In Maharashtra, pertaining to possession of toilets, it is more important to use these, rather than simply have these. If a person is using a toilet even at somebody else's place, he/she can be eligible to contest the elections. On this basis, she was permitted to be a part of the elections.

Jyoti is the first lady Sarpanch who filled the nomination form on her own. However, she could not go alone to collect her nomination certificate. So she took help of her brother and father. Although she is educated, she was not convinced that she would get the certificate easily. She recalls the entire drill and says, "This job is not easy. It takes a great deal of time and is an intense process. Less educated people have to face greater issues because the system does not treat them well."

Conditions imposed by the state in the Panchayati Raj Elections are fair, according to Jyoti. She says that the opportunity has been provided by the Panchayati Raj policy, and it is our responsibility now to adapt to it to be able to enter the mainstream. She considers education to be the most crucial factor in it, because it has given her the thrust to move forward. The same education empowers other women too, so that they can lead their lives to the fullest, free from exploitation.

Jyoti is not willing to contest for the post of Sarpanch in the next elections, believing that there are many other options for her. This opportunity must be grabbed by those women for whom it has been created, and they ought to be empowered.

Sangeeta: An Innocent Victim of Policies

Introduction

The state of Maharashtra lies in the West-Central region of India. In the southern part of Maharashtra, lies a nondescript village called Malgaon in Miraj Taluka in Sangli District. As per the 2011 Census, the total population of Malgaon is 26,917, out of which the female population is 13,224. The population of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is 17.58 per cent and 0.47 per cent, respectively. The literacy rate of the overall population is at 82.12 per cent, while the female literacy rate is at 75.56 per cent.

Sangeeta Bala Saheb Gujle, a 40-year old woman, is a resident of Malgaon village. Before marriage, she lived with her parents in village Peth of Pehlana Taluka in Kolhapur District, and came to Malgaon after her marriage. In her family of five members, she has a husband, two daughters and one son. The main source of income for them is agriculture, through which they earn INR 15,000-16,000 per month.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Before marriage, Sangeeta used to live in a large family that was economically unstable. This is the reason she could complete her education only till class 6th. The education of her siblings was also hindered due to the poor financial condition of the family. "In those days, it was a norm. Not much importance was given to education, let alone female education. It was my decision to quit school, as my family's financial condition was not good. It is today, when I am unable to contest for the election of Panchayat, that I realise what I have missed", says Sangeeta.

Sangeeta was married at a young age. Her new family was also not economically strong enough for her to continue with her education. Sangeeta is upset today because she could not complete her education due to the condition of her parents' and in-laws' house. "The time for me to get educated is long gone. Earlier, before marriage, my family was poor, and now after marriage, there are too many responsibilities to take care of. I never get time to even think of continuing my education", says Sangeeta. Besides taking care of household chores, she works in the agricultural field as well.

There are many disadvantages which Sangeeta faces because of low education. She is not able to do bank work, use Internet or get information on government schemes - and these are the areas where being less educated has put her into problems. This, however, does not prevent Sangeeta from willingly working as a social worker for the development of society. She is an active member of the local agriculture board, and helps women get loans under the Bachat Gat Yojana (savings group scheme). She is currently engaged in advising and motivating women to start running businesses from their homes. She is a member of the education committee of Marathi School, takes care of its management, and is responsible for checking the quality of the mid-day meal provided in school.



Sangeeta Bala Saheb Gujle

Age:
40 years

Educational Qualification:
Class 6

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Family Members:
5

Family's Source of Income:
Agriculture (own 3-4 acres of land)

Family's Monthly Income:
INR 15,000-16,000

Address:
Malgaon, Miraj Taluka, Sangli District, Maharashtra

She also played a vital role in the protests concerning alcohol ban. Along with other women of the village, she took the credit for shutting down an alcohol shop in the village. Sadly, even after all these initiatives, the number of people addicted to alcohol is quite large. “If I had the opportunity of becoming a Sarpanch, I would have found some better and long-term solution for this problem”, says Sangeeta.

In 2017, the seat of Malgaon was reserved for a female candidate, and Sangeeta was also interested in contesting for the election; but the rule of minimum education till class 7th did not allow her to do so. Despite this, Sangeeta’s spirit is undeterred, and she is much motivated to take strong steps to free her villagers from this curse of alcoholism.

Impact of Government Policies

Today, many women like Sangeeta are upset because they could not receive education due to poor financial condition of their families, or due to the prevailing mindset that girls are anyway going to get married, so expenditure on them would not bring returns. The women and their guardians at that time could not have imagined how much the world will change in 30 years, and how many chances will be lost merely by not being adequately educated. Today, when the government has fixed policies pertaining to eligibility for Panchayat elections, Sangeeta and many women like her will not be able to participate. It is not just the rule of minimum education, but also the rule of having only two children, which prevents many women from filling nominations.

Sangeeta says, “I wanted to contest the election of Sarpanch in Malgaon; but to be eligible, one has to be class 7th pass. I am just class 6th pass. Besides, I also fail on the norm of not having more than two children, as I have three children.” As per the Maharashtra Panchayati Raj Act, any candidate whose third child is born after the year 2001 is not eligible to contest for the elections. Sangeeta’s first child was born in 1995, and the third was born in 2003. “Due to these policies, I was not eligible to participate in the elections, and so my dream of becoming a Sarpanch could not turn into reality”, rues Sangeeta.

She further says, “I was responsible neither for my poor educational status, nor for my three children, as it is not up to a woman to decide how many children she wants, and if she wants a boy or a girl.” According to her, in the prevailing situation, women have to obey the orders of their husband and family, and at the end, they are expected to give the family at least one boy. “A woman is responsible for nothing, yet is blamed for everything. And now it is impossible for women like me to dream of contesting in the elections of Panchayat”, shares a visibly upset Sangeeta.

Sangeeta regrets that she cannot contest for the election of Sarpanch, but understands the importance of education. She believes that education brings better future for everyone. This is the reason she wants her children to get better education. She is also not against the rule of minimum education, as she believes that a Sarpanch has to be educated in order to work efficiently for development of the village.

Sangeeta used to live in a large family that was economically unstable. This is the reason she could complete her education only till class 6th. The education of her siblings was also hindered due to the poor financial condition of the family. There was not much importance given to education. She says,

“It is today, when I am unable to contest for the election of Panchayat, that I realise what I have missed.”

On the Way to Development... Despite the Hurdles

Introduction

Ranjni Panchayat lies in the Maan Block of District Satara, Maharashtra. As per the 2011 Census, the total population of the village is 300, out of which the female population is 148. The total literacy rate is at 63.37 per cent, whereas the female literacy rate is at 54.5 per cent.

29-year old Seema Raja Ram Bhansode is the Sarpanch of this village. A graduate, Seema got married in 2006. Her husband runs a computer centre, where Seema helps him by taking computer classes. The centre is the only source of income for the family of four, which helps them earn INR 7000 per month. The family comprises Seema, her husband and two children.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Seema, being a family person, never wanted to get into politics. Besides, no one in her family had ever had any political connection. Reservation for women candidates in the previous Panchayat elections provided many women the opportunity to work as the Sarpanch or Panch in villages. Seema is one such woman, who on the basis of her strong educational background, got support from the villagers, and won the elections. The villagers believed that, being a graduate, Seema had strong knowledge related to development issues of the village. This is the reason the villagers decided to choose her as their Sarpanch. Seema met all the requirements and filled the nomination form. "I was not interested in contesting the elections, and I never thought that I would become the Sarpanch unopposed. The villagers insisted so much that I had to fill the nominations", shares Seema.

Seema conducted many meetings after getting elected. It was after all those meetings that she made a blueprint for the development of the village. Through these meetings, she tried to list the problems. Unanimously, water shortage was listed as the main issue that required immediate solution. In Ranjni village, women had to walk quite a distance to fetch water. To solve this issue, a water connection was installed in every house. The second priority was given to the problem of open defecation. For this, she is getting a public toilet constructed in the village.

Seema has adopted a way of her own for doing the Panchayat work. She conducts a monthly meeting before every Gram Sabha, where all the problems are discussed, and shortlisting of issues to be discussed in Gram Sabha is done. To increase the participation of women, Seema has made them aware on the importance of Gram Sabha, their participation and their rights. "Till now, I have had a good term as a Sarpanch. I have learned many things, like how to organise and conduct Gram Sabha, when to conduct Mahila Sabha, and much more", shares an elated Seema who is enjoying her term as the Sarpanch.



Seema Raja Ram Bhansode

Age:
29 years

Educational Qualification:
Graduate

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Family Members:
4

Source of Income of the Family:
Computer Centre

Monthly Income of the Family:
INR 7,000

Address:
Ranjni Panchayat, Maan Block,
Satara District, Maharashtra

It was not as easy for Seema to perform development work as it seems, since the entire Panchayat functioning is dominated by a patriarchal thought process. The interference of the male members was visible in the Panchayat, which affected its functioning. There was no public toilet for women in the village. Strict opposition came forth from the male members when women proposed to construct toilets. Seema says that she had to face a lot of opposition from men, especially for schemes related to the empowerment of women.

Seema has worked hard for the development of the village. She feels that her biggest achievement till now has been the construction of small dams under the Jalyukt Shivar Abhiyan of Maharashtra State Government. Under her supervision, and with the unity of villagers, small dams were constructed, which solved the issue of water shortage for both drinking and irrigation purposes. Seema has received training under the 13th and 14th Finance Commission on how to work in a Panchayat, and desires to be a part of more such training sessions.

However, all of this was not as easy as it seems. The entire Panchayat functioning is dominated by a patriarchal thought process. The interference of the male members was visible in the Panchayat, which affected its functioning. There was no public toilet for women in the village. When a proposal to construct toilets was put forward, it faced strict opposition from the male members of the village. Despite being well-intentioned, the proposal was rejected. "A woman Sarpanch has to face a lot of difficulties from the males of the village. I had to face a lot of opposition from men, especially for schemes related to empowerment of women. Besides, they interfered a lot in the daily functioning of Panchayat. This interference should either be stopped completely, or at least be reduced", rues Seema.

Barring a few instances of interference from men, which affected the functioning of Panchayat, Seema, in general as a Sarpanch, had good support from people. She still has the time and opportunity to work in the next two years. Under the Digitala India Scheme, Seema wants to give children an opportunity to acquire computer knowledge. She also wishes to ensure that everyone in her village gets their Aadhar and Voter ID cards. Being a graduate, Seema did not face any major difficulty in understanding the functioning of Panchayat. She independently looks after the functioning, though the decisions related to development of Panchayat are taken after the agreement of all members. She is not hesitant in putting forward her opinion in front of the officials.

Impact of Government Policies

The 73rd amendment gave many women an opportunity to enter mainstream politics. The amendments by the State Government, on one hand, became a hurdle for many women, and on the other hand, gave a chance to many for participating in the elections. In Ranjni village, Seema Raja Ram Bhansode became the Sarpanch of the village with a general consent, without any opposition. Ranjni Panchayat has six female members and three male members.

In Maharashtra, the process of unopposed election, on one hand, permits a selected person to stand unopposed, and on the other hand, prevents many to take part in the elections. This provision gave Seema the opportunity to be a Sarpanch, but at the same, time took away the opportunity from many others. "I got this chance because it was a seat reserved for women. Had it been an open seat, I would have never become a Sarpanch", says Seema.

Lack of Education does not mean Lack of Interest

Introduction

This is the story of Shilpa Padle, who hails from Haripur village in Maharashtra's Miraj Taluka in Sangli District. 35-year old Shilpa has completed education till class 6th. Shilpa, who got married at the age of 18, lives with her husband and two children. Her family's main source of income is farming, which helps them earn INR 10,000-12,000 per month.

As per the 2011 Census, the total population of Haripur village was 7595, of which the female population stood at 3704. The literacy rate of the village as per the 2011 Census was at 86.29 per cent, while female literacy rate was at 81 per cent.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Shilpa belongs to a lower middle-class family. Like other families, Shilpa's family too follows some social beliefs. Due to lack of awareness in the family, Shilpa was allowed to pursue education only till class 6th. Also, there was no school in her village. To attend school, she was required to go quite far from the village. In these circumstances, her family did not allow her to study further, although Shilpa wanted to continue her studies.

The entire village shared the opinion that education is not for girls. "No girl in my village has studied after class 5th or 6th. Many never got a chance to study in the first place", rues Shilpa. Not only was she restricted from studying further, but as soon as she turned 18, she was also married off by her parents, pushing her into the responsibility of maintaining the household. This completely stopped her from even thinking about getting educated. She also admits that she herself was not fully aware of the benefits of education, then. But today, she feels that education is imperative. She believes that nothing is achievable without education.

Now, when Shilpa does not have much responsibility of her house, she has become socially active. She has time and apt background. Her family has contacts in the village, and long back, her brother-in-law was associated with the Panchayat. Through him, Shilpa's family is well acquainted with the functioning of Panchayat. Shilpa wants to utilise various Government schemes for the benefit of people in need. She does not have that capacity to undertake such work, as she does not hold any position in the administration. She says that there are many schemes that have not reached their village yet.

According to Shilpa, "Many destitute women in the village have to work as daily wage labourers in farms, as there are no employment opportunities available for them in the village. It is difficult for many women in the village



Shilpa Padle

Age:
35 years

Education Status:
Class 6

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Family Members:
4

Family's Occupation:
Farming

Family's Monthly Income:
INR 10,000-12,000

Address:
Haripur Village, Sangli District,
Maharashtra

to make their ends meet and pay for their children's education. It is crucial to provide employment to such women. If I had contested in the elections for the post of Sarpanch, I would have worked for these women. Since I do not fulfil the criterion of minimum education required to contest the elections, I do not have any chance for the same."

Impact of Government Policies

In the elections of 2017, the seat for Sarpanch was reserved for female candidates in Haripur. Shilpa wanted to fight the elections for this seat, but could not because of the norm of minimum education till class 7th. Shilpa regrets losing this particular opportunity. She says, "Today, I completely understand the importance of education. I couldn't fight the elections as I couldn't fulfil the criterion of minimum educational qualification." Although she approves of the importance of education, at the same time, Shilpa is of the opinion that education should not be the only criterion to work. Illiterate and less educated people, too, can very well understand the development issues of their village and work for it. After all, this is for the improvement of the services available to the villagers themselves.

Shilpa believes that support of family is a must for anyone to acquire education. It is the responsibility of the family to share the importance of education with the children of the house. Shilpa shares that, "If after marriage, I would have had interest in studying, my in-laws would have definitely supported me to study further. But neither was my interest towards education developed in the first place, nor were my parents ever enthusiastic about my education. I completely lost interest in studies." She further adds, "Now, I feel hesitant whenever I think about continuing my education. What will people say? Despite that, I will always regret not being able to contest in the Panchayat elections."

These rules and regulations of Panchayati elections, on one hand, can prove to be a fresh start for many; they can open doors of new opportunities for educated people. However, on the other hand, these new eligibility criteria can put an end to the dreams of people like Shilpa who, despite their low status of education, are willing to work committedly towards the benefit of people. Discrimination on the basis of education needs to be stopped, as it is not under the control of girls and women most of the times.

Due to some social beliefs and lack of awareness in the family, Shilpa was allowed to pursue education only till class 6th. To attend school, she was required to go quite far from the village. However, she could not study further. She says, "No girl in my village has studied after class 5th or 6th. Many never even got a chance to study in the first place."

Women as Sufferers: Politics of Policies

Introduction

45-year old Vaishali Kare is the ex-Sarpanch of Palshi Gram Panchayat in Maan Block, Satara District. Her family includes her husband, an eighteen-year old son and her mother-in-law. Their primary source of income is the two-hectare agricultural land owned by her family. Vaishali is a graduate, who runs a small cloth and artificial jewellery shop. The total income from agriculture and the shop provides her family a monthly earning of INR 15,000.

As per the 2011 Census, the total population of Palshi village is 7151, out of which 3498 comprises the female population. The literacy rate of the village is at 70.67 per cent, as per the 2011 Census, while the male literacy rate is at 79.72 per cent and female literacy rate is at 61.46 per cent. In 2011, the total SC population was 996, while the total ST population was only 11.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Originally, Vaishali is from the Vaduj town in Satara District. When in 1999, she got married in Palshi village, the environment was quite sensitive and people were scared to come out. This village was known to be rampageous. Vaishali herself was doubtful. She shares that it took her long to settle in this village where people were ready to get into a fight any time and for any cause. Coming from a peaceful environment, it was quite shocking for her. Everything was different – from the way people thought, to the way they lived. This made her uncomfortable. Disturbed by these issues, Vaishali shifted to Pune and kept visiting the village from there itself.

Vaishali's father was always into politics. However, Vaishali was never interested in the political system. This changed after her marriage. Looking at the condition of Palshi village, she wanted to change the atmosphere that reeked violence. She wanted to work for the development of the communities that wanted peace. She realised, through her continuous visits to the village, that only a handful of communities brought bad name to the entire village.

In Palshi, Vaishali was known to be an intellectual, educated woman who was different from the rest of the crowd. Her thoughts used to influence people. In 2012, when the seat was reserved for a female candidate in the Panchayati Raj elections, women in the village motivated her to participate in the elections and work for the development of the village. After initial hesitation, Vaishali agreed to contest in the elections, as she thought it to be the right time to work for the improvement of the village. However, her family was not too keen on seeing her participate in the elections. She herself was doubtful whether she would be able to fulfil the responsibility of



Vaishali Kare

Age:
35 years

Education Status:
Graduate

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Family Members:
4

Family's Source of Income:
Farming

Family's Monthly Income:
INR 10,000-15,000

Address:
Palshi, Maan Block, Satara District, Maharashtra

Vaishali was known to be an intellectual, educated woman who was different from rest of the crowd. However, Vaishali's journey as a Sarpanch was not as easy as it seems. Despite fulfilling all the requirements of the election process and having support from her family, she was let down by the patriarchal mindset of the male members of the society. The males in the village were against seeing a woman as their leader.

a Sarpanch or not, but it was her husband who gave her immense support. He told her that his support will always be there with her, and she can do whatever she wants to do. This helped Vaishali to embark upon her political journey.

The entire procedure of participation in election was done by Vaishali herself. Most of the documents that were required for the application were already with her. She got rest of the required documents issued from the office of the Tehsildar. She campaigned for the elections with her peers from the village, during which she recognised two major issues being faced by the villagers – water scarcity and open defecation. The third major issue was that women were supposed to get involved in household chores and were allowed to work only in the agriculture fields.

Vaishali started talking to women to understand the problems they face, and to find collective solutions. Water scarcity was a major problem in the village. Maan Block faced extreme shortage of water during summer. People used to fight with each other in order to get water from the tankers. To solve this problem, Vaishali started to get water filled in the wells through the tankers. On the other hand, she linked her village with the ongoing Water Conservation Campaign of the Maan Block. This helped in the construction of two Gabion Check Dams in the village, while work is still ongoing for four similar check dams in the village. It is expected that these check dams will ensure conservation of rainwater that will be available for farmers' use in their agriculture fields, and for providing drinking water to their livestock. All these initiatives helped Vaishali to win the trust of the villagers, especially women. Her continuous interaction with the womenfolk resulted in their greater participation in Gram Sabha meetings.

However, Vaishali's journey as a Sarpanch was not as easy as it seems. Despite fulfilling all the requirements of the election process and having support from her family, she was let down by the patriarchal mindset of the male members of the society. The Vanjari community dominates the Palshi village, and was completely against a woman winning the elections. The menfolk in the village were against seeing a woman as their leader. During the election campaign itself, Vaishali had started receiving taunts from this community: "How can she be the Sarpanch as she has never stayed in the village!" Vaishali informs that people never spoke in front of her, but behind her back, this kind of taunting was common. She adopted the politics of silence against all those who opposed her participation, and started working in her own ways.

During Vaishali's term, there were seven female and five male members in the Palshi Panchayat. Participation of women was a challenge in the village. As a Sarpanch, whenever she would organise meetings, women Panch members would send their husbands instead. To tackle this issue, Vaishali befriended all the women Panch members, and started spending more time with them. This resulted in their increased participation in such meetings.

In the initial phase, Vaishali had to face opposition from other sources as well. People working in the department would ask her to simply put her signature on papers, ensuring that they would take care of the rest of the proceedings. This was not acceptable to Vaishali. She started interacting with different Gram Sevaks who looked after the work of the Panchayat. She extracted all information related to her work from them, and started taking decisions based on that knowledge. Even after learning all the work-related processes, Vaishali would often break down due to the pressure and dominance of the male members in the society. Slowly, she overcame this hurdle too. Although it was easier for her to get her work done in the government office, as the concerned department was headed by a woman officer; at the level of Gram Panchayat, it was difficult, as she faced criticism from male members at every step.

Impact of Government Policies

The seat that was reserved for a female candidate in Palshi in 2012 could not be secured by Vaishali in the next term. All those who opposed her as a leader got together, and with the help of Maharashtra's 'without opposition Panchayat', did not let elections happen in the village. They chose another woman who would be a puppet in their hands, as the new Sarpanch. The influential groups in the village were against the way Vaishali worked independently using her intellect. As there was no strong reason to remove Vaishali from her post, these dominant groups decided to do away with the process of election altogether, which caused Vaishali to become a victim of local caste based politics.

Case Stories

Rajasthan



- a. Shackles in the form of New Emerging Policies
- b. End of a Dream
- c. Gaili Bai: A Hardworking Panch, but Ineligible to be a Sarpanch
- e. Rules that Limit Democracy
- e. Kamla and her Shattered Dream of a 'Smart Village'



Rajasthan

Rajasthan is located in the north-west region of India. This state is also known as “The Land of Kings”. Along with its forts, this land is also known for being a desert and dry state.

According to the 2011 Census, Rajasthan had a population of 6.86 crores, of which 66.11 per cent was literate. Of this literate population, 79.19 per cent were males and only 52.12 per cent were females. In 2001, the literacy status of women was even worse, i.e. only 43.85 per cent of the women were literate. However, according to the 2011 Census, the level of literacy in rural women of Rajasthan is 45.8 per cent. In spite of this, the government has implemented the minimum level of education law in the Panchayat elections, due to which the participation of women has been significantly affected.

In Rajasthan, there is a tradition of “Ghoongat”, which clearly reflects the status of women at home and in the society. Rajasthan’s deeply ingrained social practices, traditions and customs have passed through generations, creating a culture that accepts discrimination against women as a part of life. Rajasthan holds the highest record of girls married between the ages of 10 and 14.

Discrimination against women in the state manifests in many forms that start even before birth. Not celebrating the birth of girl child, forcing girls to drop out of school after primary level, and making them assist at home are just some examples of this. In rural areas of the state, women are excluded from decision making processes in their home and communities. Further, traditional caste and community leadership structures do not encourage women to voice their grievances openly. From all this, the question that arises is: at the end of the twentieth century, has patriarchy declined, or has it merely changed its form of expression?

Despite all this, Rajasthan was the first state to implement the 73rd Amendment. By 2016, a total of 1,21,008 members were elected in Panchayat elections in 33 districts of Rajasthan. Of this, 70,531 were women, constituting 58.29 per cent. Furthermore, 5,121 women were also appointed for the post of Sarpanch. If we talk about seat reservation for women in Rajasthan Panchayat, it accounts to 50 per cent. Though this reservation allotted in the 2016 Rajasthan Panchayat elections was commendable, in most cases, it was the women’s husbands or male relatives occupying the positions of these elected women.

In Rajasthan, the candidate has to be eligible based on the following criteria, to contest for Panchayat elections:

- Law of two children - If the candidate has more than two children, he/she cannot participate in the elections.

Recommendations and Suggestions

- ✍ Before the state governments implement any policy, they should understand the status of women in the rural Indian traditional setup. This includes their problems, their concerns, the freedom they get to move out freely on their own, the autonomy they have in terms of making decisions (for number of children in family, for building a toilet in the household premises, or the repayment of loans). If rules are made and implemented without considering the local ecosystem, it actually fails the objective of promoting their role in governance.
- ✍ The media, both print as well as electronic, can play an important role in creating awareness in the rural society, as well as bringing the challenges and concerns of EWRs to appropriate platforms, where general masses could understand and relate to their issues, concerns and limitations due to the existing gender discriminations and the stigma of poor performance.

- Non-Confidence offer letter - If two-thirds or more of the Panchayat body wants to remove any elected person from his/her post, they can do so by giving the non-confidence offer letter after a period of two years.
- Toilet rule - The person contesting in the Panchayat election must have a water-provided toilet in his/her house.
- Minimum education - According to the Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act, the person fighting for the post of Sarpanch should be at least 8th pass, and one contesting for the Panch post should be at least 5th pass.
- Any kind of payment to Cooperative Bank or electricity bill should not be outstanding/due on the candidate.
- Criminal case - There should not be any criminal charge sheet against the candidate, by which he/she is likely to get a ten year sentence from the court.

Shackles in the form of New Emerging Policies

Introduction

Thirty-year old Pushpa Devi belongs to the Nagpura village of Achpura Panchayat in Pindwada Block, Sirohi District, Rajasthan. Pushpa has completed education till class 12th. She studied till class 8th at her parents' house, and pursued further studies at her in-laws' house. Pushpa's husband, Arjun Rao, is uneducated and does farming. Pushpa lives in a joint family of eight, including her own four children. After having two children, Pushpa did not want more kids, as she felt her family was complete. However, other members of the family felt that she should have another son; and so in order to have a second son, she ended up having four children. The main income of the family is farming, and due to family feuds and property divisions, Pushpa's family is left with very little land. The family is mostly dependent on daily wage labouring jobs for their survival, and earns up to INR 10,000 a month.

According to the 2011 Census, the total population of Achpura Panchayat was 1263, and that of women was 616. The village literacy rate was at 61.78 per cent, whereas women literacy rate was at 43.91 per cent. Pushpa Devi says, "The literacy rate of Achpura village is very low, but my in-laws were very progressive and supportive regarding my further education. My father-in-law and my husband helped me a lot in attaining education. I personally believe that women's education is very important. If the womenfolk of the family are educated, the family and the society progress better."

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Pushpa is working as an ASHA counsellor/helper. Her responsibility involves informing women about health issues, convincing them to deliver their child in hospitals/clinics and the benefits of doing so. She is very responsible towards her duties.

She moves from door to door engaging women and informing them about general health, hygiene, precautions and care to be undertaken during pregnancy. She also informs women about beneficial schemes, and helps them out in undertaking required procedures.

In Nagpura village, Pushpa is playing a vital role in the 'anti-alcohol' movement. As an ASHA counsellor/helper, she has been spreading health related awareness and trying to curb superstitions regarding health practices. There are no specific hurdles in her work, although initially it was difficult for her to explain her point and convince people; but with time, this problem got resolved. An uneducated society lives in different types of fears, and people do not accept change easily. That is the reason Pushpa had to make special efforts to convince people. Slowly, as they realised that it



Pushpa Devi

Age:

30 years

Caste:

'Garasiya', Scheduled Caste

Educational Qualification:

12th Pass

Marital Status:

Married

Number of Family Members:

8 (4 children)

Family Occupation:

Farming on family owned land

Family's Monthly Income:

INR 10,000

Address:

Achpura Panchayat, Pindwada
Tehsil, District Sirohi, Rajasthan

was for their own and their family's benefit, they started paying attention. As a popular health worker, when Pushpa showed interest in taking part in the 2015 elections, she could not do so, as she did not have a toilet in her house and had four children.

Pushpa wanted to get elected as the Sarpanch and work for the betterment of her village, education of women, and their empowerment, as she believes that the only way to do it efficiently would have been to do it as a Sarpanch. This way, it would have benefitted more people.

Impact of Government Policies

The absence of a toilet was a major hindrance for Pushpa in participating in Panchayat elections. She got a toilet made in her house and even started using it. However, she was still not eligible to contest in the elections, as she is a mother of four children. She feels disheartened that it was never her decision to have four children, and yet she has to bear the brunt. She hushes and says, "Despite no fault of mine, I have to comply by the government criteria, and hence I can never contest in the elections. A toilet could be constructed, which I had got done, but I cannot reduce the number of children." She is a bit disappointed, and says that she did not know there were so many rules for contesting, else she would have never thought of it.

According to the new set of criteria, women are unable to participate in Panchayat elections due to one reason or another. If they are educated, it is the number of children or not having a toilet that restricts them. In spite of having 50 per cent reservation in Panchayat, because of this new set of eligibility criteria, capable women, who are not only popular, but can also contribute to development of the village, are being deprived of participating in the elections.

Pushpa wanted to get elected as the Sarpanch and work for the betterment of her village. However, being a mother of four children, she was not eligible to contest the Panchayat elections of 2015.

End of a Dream

Introduction

Ramiya Devi has seen 53 springs in her life, and is a resident of Ajpura Panchayat of Pindwada District in Sirohi. As per the 2011 Census, the total population of Sirohi is 1,036,346, out of which the female population is 502,115. The literacy rate of Sirohi is at 55.25 per cent, and female literacy rate is at 39.73 per cent. Including Pindwada, Sirohi has a total of five Blocks, and within Pindwada Block, there are 107 villages, out of which Ajpura is one.

Ramiya lives in Ajpura with six members of her family (husband, son, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law and father-in-law). The main source of her family's income is agriculture, which generates a monthly income of INR 8,000. Ramiya has completed education till class 5th, and her husband is a class 8th pass out. People of Ajpura have now understood the value of education and have started sending their children to school, unlike previous times when children, from an early age, were forced to work as labourers at farms.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Ramiya's husband, Sonaram, was elected as the Sarpanch in 1994. At that time, Ramiya used to accompany her husband to the meetings where discussions used to happen with villagers, especially women, on development issues. This involvement helped her gain knowledge on the functioning of Panchayat and issues faced by villagers. Her regular involvement and interaction with villagers made her a well-known face in the village.

Her popularity is also because of the fact that her husband was the president of the Garasiya community. This gave her a platform where she could interact with the community members. She used to listen to the problems of the women, and with her husband's support, used to solve them. Like other villages, Ajpura also has problems like fewer facilities for girl child education, poor health of women and prevailing social evils like child marriage. Ramiya, being an Anganwadi worker and president of the Jagrit Mahila Sanghathan, was sensitive about such issues. Her work on alcohol ban in the village has been commendable. The villagers had the habit of consuming alcohol, which not only had a negative impact on their health, but was also spoiling the peace of families. Cases of domestic violence against women were increasing. Ramiya protested against the sale of alcohol in the village. First, she protested outside the alcohol shops situated in the jungle, and demanded that they move out on their own. When nothing happened, she, along with other women, attacked and damaged the shops.



Ramiya Devi

Age:
53 years

Caste:
Garasiya, Scheduled Caste

Educational Qualification:
Class 5

Marital Status:
Married

Number of Family Members:
6

Family's Occupation:
Farming

Family's Monthly Income:
INR 8,000

Address:
Ajpura Panchayat, Pindwada
Tehsil, Sirohi District, Rajasthan

Ramiya's dream is to work towards a better future, where women can have a better life with proper education, good health and no social evils like child marriage.

Ramiya's dream is to work towards a better future where women can have a better life with proper education, good health and no social evils like child marriage. She shares that along with other basic amenities, villagers demand for minimal facilities like Aadhaar, ration card and opening of saving bank accounts. Villagers are not well informed of the benefits of the welfare policies of the government. There are many people in the village who do not know that the government gives pension to senior citizens. Ramiya wanted to work on all these issues. However, in 2015, the Ajpura seat was not reserved for women, and since her educational status did not match the eligibility criterion, she could not contest the elections.

In 2010, Ajpura Panchayat elections were won by Balki Devi on the seat reserved for ST women. Balki Devi, in collaboration with the Women and Child Development Department, used to work on health issues. Her husband was a teacher and he motivated her to contest for the elections of Sarpanch. Although Balki Devi is educated till class 8th, she is not experienced in the functioning of Panchayat. She is not capable of talking, debating and putting her thoughts in front of people. So for the Panchayat work, she used to take help of her husband. Being a woman, she faced criticism stemming from the patriarchal mindset of villagers who were not yet ready to accept a woman as their leader. The villagers did not give any importance to Balki Devi or her decisions. She executed a lot of development work during her term. Roads were constructed and people received the benefits of government schemes. The difference was that the benefits were offered only to those who were either related to Balki Devi or had supported her.

Impact of Government Policies

After the Ajpura seat was declared as reserved for women candidates, Ramiya's family thought that instead of Ramiya's husband, Ramiya should get the opportunity to contest for the elections. However, because of the changes in the Panchayat law in Rajasthan, Ramiya could not contest the elections. In the wake of the minimum educational qualification rule, Ramiya might never get a chance of participating in the elections and fulfilling her dream of developing the village. However, this was the first time that Ramiya could even dream of being the Sarpanch. The credit should be given to the 73rd amendment of the Constitution that reserved seats for women, giving them the freedom to dream. And now when women have started dreaming and dare to come out of their shackles – this new rule of minimum educational qualification has ruined all their efforts.

Gaili Bai: A Hardworking Panch, but Ineligible to be a Sarpanch

Introduction

This is the story of Gaili Bai, a Ward Panch of Paadar Panchayat in Block Revdar in District Sirohi, Rajasthan. This Panchayat has seven women Panches, and the Sarpanch of the village is a man named Mahendra Kohli. In the 2015 elections, seven seats were reserved for women candidates for the post of Panch. A member of the tribal community, Gaili is a resident of the Methipura village. She is 55 years old, and has completed education till class 3rd. The main source of income for her family, comprising six members, is agriculture. Gaili cultivates her own land, besides working as a farm labourer to make ends meet.

As per the 2011 Census, the total population of district Sirohi was 1,036,346, out of which the female population was 502,115. The literacy rate of the district was at 55.25 per cent then, and the female literacy rate was at 39.73 per cent. The district has five blocks, including Revdar.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Rajasthan is known to be a feudal society, which is reflected in the ways its villages have been structured. Gaili's village is no different. When Gaili put forth her desire to contest elections for the post of Panch, the then Sarpanch asked for her husband's approval. "My husband and son thought that even if I win the elections, they will be doing the work", said Gaili.

In the initial 4-5 months after winning the elections, Gaili was disheartened to see how no one was taking her seriously. All the information related to Panchayat work was sent to her husband and son. They were invited for the meetings instead of her. This gave Gaili a push to start learning things on her own and at a faster pace. She started focusing on the work, and learnt the nuances that helped her function better as a Panch, without being dependent on anybody else.

In the past one decade, Gaili Bai has shown great interest in social work and has been doing a tremendous job. She has not just been actively involved in spreading awareness among the villagers on social issues like child marriage and education for girls, but has also closely watched over other issues of her ward. Gaili resolved the issue of road repair, and took measures to solve the water crisis in the village. She stays at the forefront to get funds for the village. Considered as one of the most active members of the Panchayat, Gaili has always been inclined towards issues related to women and girls.

For the past many years, the problem of alcoholism has been rampant in her village. Alcoholic men would go back home and indulge domestic violence by beating their wives. This not only affected the physical health of women, but also hampered their mental well-being. Many had committed suicides, and the problem had now started affecting children too. To deal with the issue, Gaili Bai courageously got seven illegal liquor shops shut down in Padar and Bhatana Panchayat.



Gaili Bai, Ward Panch

Age:

55 years

Educational Qualification:

Class 3

Marital Status:

Married

Number of Family Members:

6

Family's Source of Income:

Agriculture, daily wagger and own land

Family's Monthly Income:

INR 4,000-5,000

Address:

Paadar Panchayat, Block Revdar,
District Sirohi, Rajasthan

Gaili Bai is a well-known name in the village. Her courage and activeness has set an example for the villagers. After understanding the responsibilities of a Panch, she is now interested in contesting the election for the post of Sarpanch. However, she will not be able to participate, as she does not meet the eligibility criterion of minimum educational qualification.

In this matter, Gaili Bai counselled and convinced other women to raise their voice against alcoholism. Initially, it was difficult for her to bring women together; but gradually, women in great numbers came forward to fight for the cause. Under the leadership of Gaili Bai, women peacefully protested outside the liquor shops. The administration did not do anything in this matter, but simply called for police from the local police post. When women saw no impact of their protests, they decided to block the excise department and SDM office, and raised slogans to prohibit alcohol and submitted a memorandum. Seeing the intensity of the protests, the excise officials and SDM requested one week's time to take action and shut down the alcohol shops. Women were adamant that they will go on an indefinite strike if their demands were not met in the stipulated time.

They waited patiently for a week, but no steps were taken. At the end, the agitated women once again sat down in front of the SDM office, and announced indefinite protest until strict actions were taken against the alcohol shop in Maithipura. Seeing the persistence of women, the SDM, Excise Head, MLA, Tehsildar and MP themselves came to the protest site. The women demanded three things – closing of the alcohol shop in Maithipura, removal of the SHO of Bhatana, and closing of hotels near the alcohol shop. Seeing the protests and the reasons for it, the MP immediately got the illegal alcohol shops shut down in Padar and Bhatana. He asked for a time period of 15 days to shut the alcohol shop in Maithipura, as it was a legal shop. He also suspended the SHO of Bhatana.

Gaili Bai successfully fought her battle with courage, strategy and planning. She is following the case personally, and keeps inspecting the alcohol shops regularly. Villagers are thankful to Gaili Bai and to all the women who were a part of this fight that resulted in the removal of the nearby illegal alcohol shops. Gaili Bai has set an example by actively participating in the administrative work.

Impact of Government Policies

Gaili Bai is a well-known name in the village now. Her courage and activeness has set an example for the villagers. After understanding the responsibilities of a Panch, Gaili is now interested in contesting the elections for the post of Sarpanch. Padar does not have seats reserved for women candidates; and even if the reservation is approved in the 2020 elections, Gaili will not be able to participate, as she does not meet the eligibility criterion of minimum educational qualification. This will result in the Panchayat losing a hardworking and deserving candidate, and Gaili Bai losing her right to contest.

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Rules that Limit Democracy

Introduction

Kesi Bai and Manju Bai belong to Gharat Panchayat of Pindwada Tehsil in Sirohi District of Western Indian state of Rajasthan. These two women had a dream of participating in the Panchayat elections in 2015, but the introduction of new rules in the same year turned out to be a major setback to their dream. They had dreamt that in the changing world, lives of women will also change. They thought that they too will get a chance to lead the world, and that their voices will be heard. These two women and their aspirations had sprouted owing to the social recognition they had gained over the years.

The total population of Gharat village is 2708, of which 1345 are women. The literacy rate of the village is at 36.18 per cent, and 18.02 per cent is the literacy rate for the women population. Malera, Gharat, Nayawas and Gadiya are four villages that form the Gharat Panchayat. Kesi Bai (40-year old) lives in ward number 1, and Manju Bai (25-year old) in ward number 7. Both Kesi and Manju belong to the Garasiya community. Kesi is illiterate, while Manju managed to gain education till class 5th in a residential camp.

Both Kesi and Manju hail from families of farmers, owning small pieces of land. To make their ends meet, these hardworking women work as labourers under MNREGA. Kesi's family, which includes her three sons and her husband, manages to earn a monthly sum of INR 5,000.

The economic condition of Manju's family of four members is better than Kesi's, as they manage to earn INR 10,000-12,000 per month. Sakaram, Manju's husband, has opened a banking servicing point in the village under e-mitra scheme. He assists community members in all the banking related tasks, such as opening bank accounts, withdrawing and depositing money in their accounts. He also heads the much active Yuva Shakti Sangathan. Income from all these sources help them live a modest life.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

Kesi Bai's family is a well-reputed family in the village, and is known for their honesty. In case of disputes, villagers look up to their family for guidance and taking wise decisions. The community members respect Kesi Bai, as she belongs to this family. Although associated with social activities, Kesi Bai is not as active as Manju, who has an active social network where she keeps discussing issues related to village development.

Manju is associated with a local organisation that aims at creating awareness among villagers and providing them information on various government schemes. She keeps working with adolescent girls and women of the village. She is also associated with a women's group, and helps create awareness among villagers on issues of drug addiction.



Kesi Bai

Age:
40 years

Caste:
Garasiya

Education Status:
Illiterate

Marital Status:
Married

Address:
Gharat Panchayat, Pindwada
Tehsil, Sirohi District, Rajasthan

Kesi Bai and Manju Bai both are keen to participate in the Sarpanch elections. However, both Kesi and Manju could not do so, despite being active, famous and committed towards the development of their village. The reason for this was their low level of education and having more than two children.



Manju Bai

Age: 25 years

Caste: Scheduled Tribe

Education Status: Class 5

Marital Status: Married

Address: Gharat Panchayat,
Pindwada Tehsil, Sirohi District,
Rajasthan

Impact of Government Policies

After the introduction of the new rule wherein 50 per cent seats were reserved for women candidates, the villagers wanted Kesi Bai to fight elections for the post of Sarpanch. Manju too was keen on participating in the elections. However, both Kesi and Manju could not participate despite being active, famous and committed towards the development of their village; the reason being their low level of education and having more than two children.

The 2015 elections, however, were won by a woman candidate – Neera Devi, who hails from the Rawal community. Neera fulfilled the criterion that made her eligible for the post. She had completed her education till class 10th and belonged to a family with a political background. Her father-in-law had once served the village as Sarpanch, and was well aware of the functioning of the Gram Panchayat. Neera Devi was assisted by her husband and father-in-law. She took all the important decisions after consensus from other Panchayat members, villagers, and in consultation with experienced men from her family. As a Sarpanch, she had taken several steps to develop the village.

With strict rules and eligibility criteria under the Panchayat law, a deserving woman candidate had won the elections. However, these rules laid by the government at the state and central level have taken away such democratic opportunities from women like Kesi and Manju. They also restrict the options villagers have in the Panchayat elections. If along with Neera Devi, Kesi and Manju could also have contested the elections, the competition would have been more interesting, besides providing villagers with a great variety of options to elect from. These new rules are not only restricting the participation of women in these elections, but are also limiting the options of good contestants that can be made available to the villagers.

Kamla and her Shattered Dream of a 'Smart Village'

Introduction

Sirohi is a large district in the state of Rajasthan. According to the 2011 Census, the total population of the district is 10,36,346, on which the total population of women is 5,02,115, with the female literacy rate projected at 39.73 per cent. Including Pindwara, there are five other blocks in the district. Kamla Devi (53-year old) is the former Sarpanch of Barja Panchayat of Pindwara. She has completed her education till class 5th. The main sources of income for her family are government service and farming, which add up to a monthly income of approximately INR 20,000. Kamla lives in a joint family of seven members, including her husband, mother-in-law, father-in-law and three children.

Barja Panchayat is situated in the middle of the Aravali mountain range, with the population of farmers constituting the majority of residents in the Panchayat. There is a facility of primary and secondary education in the village. In 2005, when Barja Panchayat announced reserved seats for women candidates, Kamla contested and won the elections to become the Sarpanch. There were six women and seven men in Kamla's team of 13 Panchayat members. In 2010, the rules changed, and the seat was announced as a general seat in Barja. Had the seat still been reserved for women, it could have been a second session for Kamla. However, the general seat was won by a man called Kaluram.

Efforts, Challenges and Achievements

The lack of education was a major hindrance for Kamla Devi in understanding Panchayat's work at the beginning of her tenure as Sarpanch. Kamla's husband, the Ward Panch and Panchayat members were a great help. Ishwar Singh, a resident of the village, said, "Contestants from different parties fight with each other at the time of elections, but once the Panchayat is formed, they help the elected winners." This mutual understanding among the villagers proved to be of great help to Kamla. Slowly, her grasp on the functioning of Panchayat strengthened, and she got over her initial fear and hesitation. Initially, she felt hesitant in organising the Gram Sabha meetings and various other discussion committees. However, over due course of time, she started successfully organising meetings in which she efficiently addressed the issues of people and resolved them.

Kamla Devi worked hard for the development of the village, in which her husband helped her. In order to make the Panchayat clean and free from



Kamla Devi, Former Sarpanch

Age:
53 years

Caste:
Sargara, Scheduled Caste

Education Status:
Class 5

Marital Status:
Married

Family Members:
7

Occupational Status of the Family:
Farming and Government service

Monthly Income of the Family:
INR 20,000

Address:
Barja Panchayat, Pindwara Tehsil,
District Sirohi, Rajasthan

Kamla helped the women in the Panchayat by creating Self Help Groups on her own, and encouraged them to become financially independent.

The community members were happy with Kamla Devi's work, and for this reason, she wanted to contest the election of Sarpanch in 2015.

Unfortunately, she was left behind in this race due to the mandatory minimum educational qualification of passing class 8th in Panchayat elections.

open defecation, she got toilets constructed, and ensured access to clean drinking water for children of the school. Kamla helped the women in Panchayat by creating Self Help Groups on her own, and encouraged them to become financially independent. She also introduced them to various government schemes to derive benefits. Among other things, Kamla was also responsible for getting a cremation ground constructed in the village. She also ensured the construction of a platform in the village for community meetings. The community members were happy with Kamla Devi's work, and for this reason, Kamla Devi too wanted to contest the elections of Sarpanch in 2015.

Impact of Government Policies

In 2015, Barja seat was once again declared open as a women's seat; but this time, it was also a seat opened for Scheduled Tribes, resulting in Manisha Devi being elected as the new Sarpanch. Surely, the seat is still in the hands of a woman, but Kamla was left behind in this race due to the reservation, and that too in such a way that she might not be able to become a Sarpanch again. Now, there is an obstruction in front of her in the form of mandatory minimum educational qualification of passing class eighth. Kamla is very disappointed about not being able to participate in the 2015 elections. She says, "After getting elected in the 2010 elections, I got a chance to do something for the village. Yes, initially it took me some time to understand the problems and processes, but I eventually learnt it. And now, I was expecting to work better because of my experience."

Her dream was to make her village a 'smart village', a goal she had planned to work towards in her next term as Sarpanch. Kamla is not the only woman facing such a situation. One may find many such women in several villages of Rajasthan, who will no longer have the opportunity to be a part of this democratic system.

Conclusion

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments enacted in 1993 opened a new vista in women's journey towards empowerment, for they paved the way for assured entry of women in grassroots governance though 33 per cent reservation in Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs). With the establishment of PRIs in our country, it is assumed that a woman gets opportunities to prove her worth as a good administrator, decision-maker or a good leader, which is seen in quite good number of cases. However, in many areas of our country, this provision of space to women in PRIs has not borne fruits.

This study, 'Advocacy for Change: Promoting Women's Participation and Leadership in Local Governance' in Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat, worked to understand the impact of the policies on women's lives, both in the public and private sphere, and assess the extent to which the policy has affected women's autonomy, their position in the family and their participation in the political process. It has examined the impact of policies like the minimum education criterion, two-child norm, functional toilet etc., on the political participation of the poor and socially disadvantaged rural women.

While analysing the stories under the project, the similarity in content was visible to a good extent. It was observed that women were getting a push, due to the positive policies, to enter into the sphere of governance as EWRs, but were also facing challenges due to the new rules and the existing dynamics of gender stereotyping and seeing women as a weaker sex.

The analysis of stories from the six states has revealed instances where due to elected women representatives, the nexus of officers and male elected representatives was seen to be breaking, which has a direct impact on reducing corruption and bringing efficiencies. In a few cases, the role of local muscle power was also seen to be getting weaker due to active participation and awareness of EWRs about their rights and power. In most of the cases, women were seen to be following the participatory approach to get people's views and their active participation. Domestic violence was also seen to be substantially declining due to women Pradhan / Sarpanch. It was observed that the villagers feel free to share their grievances with women representatives. In a nutshell, the growing participation of the marginalised section in general, and women in particular, is transforming our democratic setup from representative democracy to participatory democracy.

In all the states, women were seen to be impacted by these rules. The much heard phenomenon of Sarpanch Pati was still seen to be existing in most of the locations. Whether it is a progressive state like Karnataka, or states like Chhattisgarh, Haryana or Gujarat, men's supremacy was seen to be widespread from home to the Panchayats.

The story was seen to be somewhat different in Karnataka where the policies were not impeding women, and were giving the participants full opportunity to contest in the Panchayat elections. For example, there is a provision of a rule for bringing the 'No-Confidence Motion' against the elected person, but the Panchayat body cannot bring this motion before a period of two years. This rule benefits the elected persons since it takes at least two years for them to learn and perform, whereas in rest of the states under study, such provision of two years' time duration does not exist. This is seen to be used against women who want to work on their own without succumbing to the pressure of fellow men in Panchayats.

Similarly, there is no special rule in Karnataka of having a toilet to become eligible to contest in Panchayat elections, and aspirants being asked to give an affidavit regarding its availability/non availability. In Maharashtra, as per the state rule, the EWRs have to use toilets (if not at home, then anywhere in the vicinity), whereas in rest of the states, functional toilet is a pre requisite. In Chhattisgarh, being a tribal area, the relaxation is given to build a toilet within three months. In this context, the observation of the project team was that due to shortage of water in field situations, and more so in drought affected areas, the usage of toilets is less, even if constructed. It was also shared by communities that the government's financial support to build toilets does not reach in totality to the villagers, so toilets were either not built properly or were not 'complete' in structure.

Most of the women were seen getting obstructed by the education criterion in Chhattisgarh and Haryana. It is not like the minimum education criterion is affecting only the elderly women, rather it is seen to be impacting even younger women, especially women of backward classes. The Government argues that these rules will help in setting examples before others, but making women suffer for a reason for which they are not even responsible is a big question. Few women who were getting adversely impacted by this rule were of the opinion that if such rules are made applicable for Panchayat elections, they should be made applicable for the Vidhan Sabha (VS) and Lok Sabha (LS) representatives as well.

On one hand, in Panchayati Raj elections, the rule of educational qualification advocates for the arrival of educated women in local government, while on the other hand, a large section of society is deprived of even contesting the elections due to the inability to fulfil the eligibility criterion. There are no two opinions about the fact that the level of education in the country has increased significantly in the last few years, but it is also a bitter truth that even today, there is a large population in the rural areas which is disadvantaged in terms of education. According to the 2011 census figures, 74 per cent of the population of India is literate, of which the percentage of men is 82.2 and that of women is 65.5. It is true that the government has increased their participation by increasing the reservation to 50 per cent from 33 per cent (in the local governance), but by applying the rule of minimum educational qualification, women are discouraged (even though they have done very good work in the past) from contesting.

Due to the norm of two children, again, women are facing difficulties in contesting in Panchayat elections. In a country where women are not even allowed to sit in front of their in-laws on a chair or bed, how can it be thought that they can decide on the number of children? Moreover, it has been well exhibited in field visits through observation and through discussions with women that the overall desire of having a male child in the family becomes a compulsion for the woman to have more children, and this ultimately becomes a barrier for her. Though there are small variations observed in the states under study regarding this rule, overall it has negatively impacted their participation in Panchayat elections.

The two-child norm has been seen to act as a discriminatory factor to disempower the marginalised groups, such as Dalits, Adivasis and communities like Muslims, and such an eligibility criterion becomes more oppressive than emancipating. Data in a separate research study has shown that nearly 50 per cent of the disqualified candidates constitute SC, ST and OBC categories. This study, sponsored by the UNW, depicts clearly the plight of women and other socially disadvantaged groups in terms of their participation in local governance on one hand, and inadequate coverage of their concerns and issues on the other hand. The stories have also represented diversity - some women faced harassment and still continued working; some were in good positions, but as a well-accepted practice, male members of the families were in command; whereas in some cases, well educated women were seen taking advantage of these norms and showing good results. Still an interesting point was mentioned by these women that they got to this position primarily not because they were educated, but because the seat was reserved and they were seen as good options.

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Rudi No Radio
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Devi Lal

Organisation

Radio Madhuban
Radio Madhuban
Radio Madhuban
Radio Madhuban
Radio Madhuban
Radio Madhuban
Radio Madhuban
Radio Madhuban
Radio Madhuban
Radio Kamalwani
Radio Kamalwani



About UN Women

UN Women is the UN organisation dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women, with specific focus on the elimination of discrimination against women and girls, empowerment of women, and achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action and peace & security. UN Women's office based in New Delhi covers four countries: India, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka. In these countries, UN Women strengthens women's rights by working with women, men, feminists, women's networks, governments, local authorities and civil society. With all of them, UN Women helps to create national strategies to advance gender equality in line with national and international priorities. In India, the nodal ministry for UN Women is the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

UN Women stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on six priority areas:

1. Ending violence against women
2. Promoting Leadership and Participation
3. National Planning and Budgeting
4. Economic Empowerment
5. Peace and Security
6. Migration

UN Women's work in local governance space in India: UN Women is currently implementing the second phase of its programme on Gender Responsive Governance (GRG) (2015-2018) in partnership with Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR).

The Programme is being implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj across six states, namely Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Odisha. The programme aims at strengthening capacities of governance institutions to ensure that gender concerns are embedded in the design and implementation of legislation, policies and programmes. The current phase of the GRG programme builds on learnings that emerged from the first phase of UN Women programme on 'Promoting Women's Political Leadership and Governance in India' (2011-13), also implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, in 15 districts across 5 states of the country.

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About Development Alternatives Group

Development Alternatives (DA), the world's first social enterprise dedicated to sustainable development, is a research and action organisation striving to deliver socially equitable, environmentally sound and economically scalable development outcomes. DA's green technology innovations for habitat, water, energy and waste management, which deliver basic needs and generate sustainable livelihoods, have reduced poverty and rejuvenated natural ecosystems in the most backward regions of India.

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