

Full Length Research

Women participation in Panchayati Raj elections of 2011 in J&K: A case study of Block Nagam

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In India, the local self-governance institutions have been existing since long. In ancient times, women have been fully indulging in its works. Then in medieval times, it did not remain the same. Women were not given any reservation in these institutions. It was only by 73rd amendment Act that the women were given 33% of reservation. Panchayati raj takes democracy to the grass root level where most of the marginalised sections of the society reside. This paper tries to examine the participation of women in Panchayati raj institutions of J&K selecting Nagam block as a study area.

Keywords: Democracy, Women, Panchayati raj, Grass root level, Rights.

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INTRODUCTION

Democracy is that form of government that gives equal opportunity to both men and women. Equal rights and equal opportunity have been given to both men and women. However, today's society does not fit in this definition. In our day-to-day lives, we see that no such conditions prevail in which both men and women can actively participate in the system whether economic, political or anything else.

Panchayati Raj has been seen in the Indian history as an age-old phenomenon. In India Panchayat or village, councils have existed over the centuries. Although there is a great difference between the traditional Panchayat and modern ones, the former being informal bodies of village elders from overriding castes and families. The issues of law and order problems and the general welfare of the people were dealt with by these informal bodies.¹ However, after independence major changes were brought in local self-governance. Various committees like Balwant rai Mehta committee, Ashoka Mehta committee, L.M. Singhvi committee were created for giving the Panchayat Raj Institutions a constitutional status. It was

only during P.V. Narsimha Rao's prime ministership that the historical 73rd and 74th amendments were passed by the Indian parliament on 22 Dec 1992. While the 73rd amendment dealt with Panchayat Raj Institutions in rural India, the 74th amendment was concerned with urban governance.

The 73rd constitutional Amendment Act (1992) mandates provisions for establishment of three-tier structure with the establishment of Gram Sabha at village level, Panchayat Samati at intermediate level and Zilla parishad at district level. Regular elections to Panchayat every five year are to be conducted with proportionate seats reserved for schedule castes and schedule tribes. Reservation shall not be less than 1/3 seats for women. A state finance commission is to be constituted to recommend measures to improve the finances of Panchayat. MLA's, MLC's at the intermediate and district level Panchayat Raj institutions with full voting right. The main purposes of Panchayat elections are to bring power from secretariat to the Grass route level. The central government cannot reach to the far-flung areas so the

Panchayats are created to deal with their issues.

Article 243 G and the Eleventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution lay down that states must endow Panchayats with such powers and authority, which will enable them to function as institutions of Self-government. Although both Article 243G and the Eleventh Schedule do not apply to J&K, still they are relevant in the context of the local self-governance reforms agenda being pursued at the national level.²

Panchayat raj is a system of governance in which a gram (village) Panchayat is the basic unit of administration. It has three levels:

- (a) Village
- (b) Block
- (c) District

History of Panchayat raj in J&K

The Jammu & Kashmir Village Panchayat Regulation Act, 1935:

J&K Panchayat comprised of Zaildar, Numberdar, village heads, Landlords, and other people in the rural areas. Regarding the Panchayats in J&K an Act was laid down by the then Maharaja Hari Singh in 1935, under the Regulation no. 1. The preamble of this Act, stated,

“it is expedient to establish in Jammu & Kashmir State the village Panchayats to assist in the administrative, civil and criminal justice and also to manage the sanitation and other common concerns of the village”.

The main aim behind the promulgation of this Act was not to endorse Panchayat Raj but to use Panchayats for the extension of Government for judicial and civil administration.³

Subsequently it was amended in 1941 and lastly state government as village Panchayat Act 1958 passed it. It was in 1937 – 1938 that for the first time Panchayats were established in the state. Then the Jammu & Kashmir Panchayat Raj Act, 1989 was introduced in the J&K assembly in April 1988 and passed in March 1989. Subsequently, first elections under the Act were held in 2001. But these elections were not completed due to the bad situations in the state. The State Cabinet vide Cabinet Decision No: 40/3/2011 dated 09.02.2011 decided to hold the elections to the Halqa Panchayats and to establish Panchayat Raj Institutions at all three levels of local self Government. The elections were conducted in 17 phases and were conducted during the period 14.03.2011 to 27.06.2011. 4082 Sarpanches and 28,253 Panches were elected, with State level average voter turnout of about 77.71 percent.⁴

Unlike other states, J&K has its own Panchayat Raj Act

1992, which is different from 73rd amendment Act with 2700 Panchayat Halqas (1470 in Kashmir & 1230 in Jammu). Section 14, section 34(2) and section 47 of J&K Panchayat Raj Act, 1989 requires Halqa Panchayat, Block Development Council and the District Planning and Development Board respectively to have their own accounts.⁵

Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj (Amendment) Act, 2013 made certain changes in the section 28, Act XI of 1989 such as:

“Provided that not less than one-third of the total number of offices of Chairmen to be filled by direct election in every district shall be reserved for women and such offices may be allotted by rotation to different Block Development Councils in a district in such manner and by such authority as may be prescribed”.

The reason behind this amendment bill was that the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati raj Act, 1989 provided for reservation for women at the level of Halqa Panchayat but there was no reservation of Women at the level of selection as Chairmen of Block Development Councils. The Bill seeks to provide for reservation of women at level of Chairmen of Block Development Councils so that they can get their due representation at the level of Block Development Council also.⁶

Women Participation:

The 2011 Panchayati elections were significant from the view that for the first time that women and SCs/STs were given 33% reservation in accordance to their population in panch constituencies. The present paper has examined the participation of women in 2011 elections in Panchayati raj institutions of J&K. The Nagam block of district Budgam is selected for the study. The objective of the paper is to study the participation of women in Panchayats. Some prominent symbols of the candidates were Candle, table, Cup and saucer, Sewing machine, Kite, Road roller.

The Table 1 shows that there is still lack of women participation in the political affairs at the grass root level. The percentage of women is minute i.e. just 0.6493%. We see out of 154 candidates applying for Sarpanch, just 1 candidate is female. Even that one female candidate has withdrawn her form. Thus, we see no female candidate was elected as Sarpanch in Nagam block.

From the Table 2 we can analyse a little bit difference in the participation of women in the Panch elections. The percentage here is 30. From the 177 female candidates, 9 have withdrawn their forms and 164 were actually in the field. In the final round, 14 women were elected as Panches. We can now say that more women fought the

**Table 1. Panchayat Elections in Nagam Tehsil Charar-i-sharif District Budgam (2011 elections):
Political Structure of NAGAM (block) 2011 elections
Elections for Sarpanches**

No. of forms received	No. of forms rejected	No. of forms withdraw	No. of Vacant seats	No. of candidate in fray	No. of candidates elected unopposed	No. of voters	Voting %	No. of Sarpanches elected
Sarpanch-154	Sarpanch-0	Sarpanch-33	Sarpanch-1	Sarpanch-121	Sarpanch-2	37519	Sarpanch-70%	37
Male-153	Male-0	Male-32	Male-1	Male-121	Male-2	Male-19454	—	37
Female-1	Female-0	Female-1	Female-0	Female-0	Female-0	Female-18065	—	0

Source: Rural Development Office, Nagam

Table 1. Elections for Panches

No. of forms received	No. of forms rejected	No. of forms withdrawn	No. of Vacant seats	No. of candidate in fray	No. of candidates elected unopposed	Voting %
Panch-590	Panch-11	Panch-59	Panch-0	Panch-520	Panch-39	Panch-67%
Male-413	Male-7	Male-50	Male-0	Male-356	Male-25	—
Female-177	Female-4	Female-9	Female-0	Female-164	Female-14	—

Source: Rural Development Office, Nagam.

elections for Panches than for Sarpanches. In 2001 elections, no women were elected as Sarpanch in the entire district of Budgam and just 2 Panches were elected in the entire Budgam district. As compared to 2001 elections, in 2011 elections a big change has been seen from the angle of women participation. 14 Panches were elected in Nagam block only. Where as in 2001 elections just 2 Panches were elected in the entire district of Budgam.

Lack of women participation in political decision-making deprives them of their important rights and duties. Views of women regarding political affairs are missing from grass root level to the national level, be it a budget discussion or Panchayat Samati. They often remain unheard or ignored.

CONCLUSION

In the end, one can say that women have not yet

understood or utilized the reservation opportunity to come to the forefront in the political sphere. Although the political participation of many women like Mehbooba Mufti; Chief minister of J&K and Asiya Naqash; a Minister in the present government, have shown the change in the society. Yet at the grass root level, women lack awareness about their role and need in the political affairs and decision-making. Gender biases should be eradicated in every sphere. Women representation in totality is not very effective. The government should implement 73rd amendment Act in letter and spirit. Women should be made aware of their role in the nation building so that we can have their adequate participation in the political institutions. Women should be made aware of their rights and obligations in all fields of life. This process can be carried out in the schools and Families. The concept of local self-governance in Jammu & Kashmir needs to be elaborated and detailed so that all the marginalised groups whether women, ST's, or SC's may enter this political arena.

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