



Review Article

All-Women Gram Panchayats in Reformation of Rural Roots

Monalisha Chakma^{1*}, Dr. Neelam Pandey²

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Political Science & Public Administration, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar Chidambaram Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu India

²Research Supervisor, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science & Public Administration Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu, India

Corresponding Author: * Monalisha Chakma

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Abstract	Manuscript Information
<p>A safe domain of autonomous decision-making power and descendant accountability of local governments is an institutional set-up for developing social equity and efficiency. Through political participation, individuals empower themselves in decision-making and policy strengthening their needs. The inclusion of women and minorities in political participation in the political progression has become an important factor for proper social equity, enabling them to identify their problems and negotiate a healthier solution to certain issues. After 1993, at the grassroots level, the number of women's political participation increased due to the implementation of the 73rd Amendment bill, which was intended to bring a reckonable change and qualitative good governance. The purpose of this paper is to examine the working conditions of all-women gram panchayats in Uttarakhand such as Rauliyana Gram Panchayat, Pachisi Gram Panchayat, Nagkorali Gram Panchayat, Latur village of Maharashtra and Bubnal Gram Panchayat in Shirol taluka, southern Maharashtra. It also highlights the reformation policies initiated by the all-women gram panchayat, and how they bring contribution to their respective villages, even during the pandemic which caused havoc in the country. It evaluates how it could be beneficial for the policy makers in other parts of the country. Finally, to find out the challenges they encountered and how it is different from mixed gram panchayat as well as to compare and contrast with the impact of rotational Panchayat seats between men and women with 50:50 reservation bill planned by the Haryana Government for the candidate of both the genders after each term.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISSN No: 2583-7397 ▪ Received: 19-08-2024 ▪ Accepted: 28-09-2024 ▪ Published: 29-11-2024 ▪ IJCRM:3(6); 2024: 103-108 ▪ ©2024, All Rights Reserved ▪ Plagiarism Checked: Yes ▪ Peer Review Process: Yes <p>How to Cite this Manuscript</p> <p>Monalisha Chakma, Neelam Pandey. All-Women Gram Panchayats in Reformation of Rural Roots. International Journal of Contemporary Research in Multidisciplinary.2024; 3(6):103-108.</p>

KEYWORDS: Women Empowerment, Gram Panchayat, All-Women Councils, Leadership, Importance of Women, Community, Equal Decision-Making Body

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Margaret Thatcher "If you want something said, ask a man; if you want something done, ask a woman". All-women village council gram panchayat was formed in the year of 1989 in nine villages of Maharashtra which was a revolutionary step in the country mainly through the campaign of Shetkari Sanghatana, a farmer's organization because of

which many transformations have been initiated such as women's property rights, brought changes in the atmosphere of the villages along with their attitude and girl-child has changed. However, there was still involvement of men in empowering women as they were backed by their husbands and activists who were all men. Therefore, decentralizing at the grass-roots level has made women slowly and gradually a participatory decision maker and

building their capacity as many young women over the years who are well educated have become a representative in their respective village and gram panchayat to help their society and community and it became possible only through both 73rd Amendment and 74th Amendment Act amendment of Indian Constitution April 1993. While the 73rd amendment has made it easier for women to participate in village governance, through reservation policy of 33% increased into 50% but does not allow them to determine programme priorities or advance and complete certain policies which is a major setbacks in Panchayati Raj System as there has always been loophole in the formulation of management due to certain flawed of Indian administration in public policy but there are Gram Panchayats which has made itself proud and had become a pride and a model for other women in the country not only for Panchayat Village Council but in State's Village Council such as All- Women Village Council in Uttarakhand and Maharashtra where all the major position are handled by women and represented by young women elected presentative in mobilizing the community which indicate that women's participation in panchayats is marking an impact in the society at grassroots governance leisurely and progressively with persistent, as they are now well aware of their duties and benefits, though it was difficult and rough fetches to achieve.

Women are also contributing to raising awareness of the importance of education be it a girl or boy child, addressing water sanitation, water irrigation, suspension of projects that could harm the environment and nature, women's menstruation, and fuel issues. They are also educating themselves through which they are overcoming social stigmas and exercising good leadership with cooperation.

2. OBJECTIVES

This paper aims to

- examine the working of these all-women councils in the gram panchayat
- how did they form an all-women council?
- What are the challenges, they have encountered while achieving and maintaining their status quo?
- To identify the difference between the working of all-women council gram panchayat and both gender council gram panchayat.
- To examine how it has benefitted them in empowerment.
- To observe, a glimpse of rotational reservation of seats for both genders.

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a qualitative study on descriptive method where secondary sources have been used and collected from various articles, research papers, and media channels.

Gram Panchayat Under All-Women Council and Performance of Its Presidents and Its Members

Article 15 of the Indian Constitution and the 73rd Amendment 1992 added a change in social democracy which provides prevention of discernment on the grounds of religion, race, caste,

sex, or birth place and a new identity in inclusive government in India. Indian Constitution has implemented and guaranteed numerous rights to women assuring them the equivalent opportunity to animate in dignity with their fundamental rights in the society according to social demand of the country. These rights empowered the women to identify their rights in associating themselves in the

social, political, and economic spheres of life. All Women Panchayats have existed in various states of India since 1989, however, it has its loophole in maintaining the formation of their rural roots and lost the essence of collective women leadership as all women gram panchayats started diminishing since 2016 when the first 100% women occupied gram panchayat by all non-political background women members, Bubnal Gram Panchayat in Shirol Taluka, the southern part of Maharashtra headed by President Sonali Shahpure were all the members handling political administrative policies with their household duties, they were formed by elders for bringing transparency and accountability into the development process of the village, the members were able to achieve numerous fund from the government for development and petition for a special fund for future development work. This progress of the village set a great example for neighboring villages. There are panchayats in Uttarakhand and Maharashtra in 2020, where all-women Panchayats such as Rauliyana, Nagkorali, and Pachissi gram panchayat of Uttarakhand and Latur village of Maharashtra, set a remarkable example and became pride in Indian political system at the grassroots level of democracy in 2021 and Anandwadi village of Latur's Nilanga Takula gram panchayats has showed greater participation of women in politics, particularly, in rural governance. These particular grams panchayat have made history as they boost women's political participation in local governance with all women council in reforming the society and rural roots, enlarging social acceptance of women in leadership positions. These Panchayats also have the potential of mobilizing more women into politics, occupying public office, retrieving resources as well as reforming a change of social change in educating a girl child with the belief that women also can run a parliament and a country with the right virtue and resources.

Anandwadi Village which is most commonly known as Guar of Latur's Nilanga takula gram panchayats in Maharashtra has become an all-women panchayat in 2021 after nine years 50% of seats were reserved for women which was possible after reviewing the performance of two-time Panchayat President Bhagyashree Chame paving a way for other women to be part of rural governance. Since her reign in 2005, the village saw a remarkable improvement and social and political reform as the village's cleanliness has had a major impact, a campaign against superstitions, a sanitary napkin dispenser, and inclusion of widows in festivals, she molded a drive to encourage organ donation and built a free flour-grinding mill. Through her help seats have been reserved for ST women for President with the approval of the administration, one of the changes for which the village is proud is the normalization of menstruation and the property cards are in the name of women and men sharing equal

work in the farms. Guar became an example of good leadership where all-women gram panchayat works together with the community without demeaning anyone based on their caste and background. Rauliyana Gram Panchayat which is headed by Dalit President Kavita Arya, Pachissi Gram Panchayat whose President is Hema Negi one of the youngest Panchayat President in India and Nagkorali gram panchayat, is the village council gram panchayat showed that women can be tuned in the needs of the community and has brought a significant achievement in forming all-women panchayat. They believe that women are capable of all-important posts if they work cooperatively with vibrant decision-making. Women Representatives, and members of the All-Women Council can easily understand and engage better with each other as well as mobilize other women in the community as they are more accessible and approachable than men. There is intergenerational solidarity among women leaders which helps them in reimagining the future as watching each other gives them the courage to tackle any situation. Hema Negi well aware and self-assured young women, unites everyone in the village council known be educated brought benefits into the village admired by the whole community and its council members as she is aware of the policies and where to implement administrative policy. Education of the Panchayat President and awareness is one of the major assets that brought all women together in leadership positions aspiring other women and women to educate themselves and help in forming social democracy in the rural areas. Hema Negi, Kavita Arya in their respective panchayats along with the ward members helped in resolving the issue of drinking water source as that was one of the challenges women faced and focused on building irrigation canals and proper roads to walk on to fetch water from its source. In most cases, even if women become village heads, their husbands make all decision. However, in all women councils of Uttarakhand women takes all the initiatives in the formulation of the policies. Hema Negi provided her own land to build an Anganwadi Centre, which she received from her father, which was provided only to a male child in the villages. Earlier women were not gainfully employed after Hema became the panchayat president; women started getting more employment opportunities. With the coming of power of all the women, Rauliyana, Pachissi and Nagkorali gram panchayat have witnessed an ecological, economic, and social transformation. They fulfilled most requirements and possibilities in their village, banned illegal mining and logging banned water theft. A small village Kamballi in Kadapa district in Andhra Pradesh is also a great example of great collective women leadership in the reformation of rural roots, where all women panchayat administration was formed in 2018 led by President Bhoomireddy Umadevi, wherein all the ward members and President of this panchayat are women setting an example for other villages and panchayats by winning the Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar through all-round development into the village as the village was flagging on many facades. There were no roads, and severe water scarcity which was a major challenge for the village but the women's administration with their own pockets especially the women president solved the issues by

constructing concrete roads, illuminating solar, implanting free purified drinking water plants, etc.

How All Women Panchayats Are Different from Mixed Panchayat

There has always been tension, discrimination, and a persistent conflict between males and females in mixed Panchayats, such as political party exclusion and caste-based persecution that women have had to suffer. While discharging her duties, Muktiben Patel, a backward caste woman who became President of Nitaya village in Ketala's Hoshangabad district, faced repeated no-confidence motions from the area's Higher Caste. Kesarbai, a scheduled caste Panchayat President of the Sona Savri gram panchayat also of Hoshangabad district, had to suffer death threats from men belonging to higher castes and was attacked within her home premises. There are also incidents where women felt low self-esteem being a single women candidate in Nanded district's Bhaswadi village of Maharashtra as Sumanbai Nurude, a widow contested in gram panchayat and won the election in male-dominated Marathwada region, in order to bring changes and raise awareness in the region due to her own experience of facing social stigma but had to faced endless challenges while after her win and before as while trying to avail benefits of a government scheme to provide subsidies to widows failed to get her request cleared and many women President has faced lack of cooperation with their fellow male council member. Somehow, the dynamic between women is easier to manage according to the ward member. Women are more adept at resolving confrontations based on experience by a ward member as they resolved and advocated many critical issues. It allowed them to share more equally in decision-making. All women-council notify, that they encouraged each other each other gives each other and build confidence to perform better. Nargis Devi, a panchayat president of Nagorolali says if women remain passive and allow others to hold them down, they will. Therefore, they needed to viewpoint to proclaim their rights.

All women panchayats are an enhancement to women's political participation in local governance. It strongly indicates an increased social acceptance in leadership positions. There has also been a noticeable improvement in gram panchayat administration, owing to the fact that women Presidents have meetings during the day and no unconvinced transactions are made at night. According to preliminary reports from women-run Panchayats, they appear to be more persuasive and effective than men in battle against corruption at the grassroots level.

Major Challenges Faced by Women's Council

At the beginning of the all-women gram panchayat formation in 1989, women couldn't do political activities without the help of their male counterparts or activists who were all male, even in terms of the decision-making process, and didn't achieve their purpose solely. They mostly enumerated their husband's work and activities, losing their accountability in the political forefront which has changed in the past years. In Uttarakhand, all women in gram panchayat and elsewhere, who enter political power encounter many challenges as one of the elected President Kavita

Arya belonging to SC (Dalit Community) uncovered the nature of structural barriers of caste that hinders women's participation in decision-making in rural governance as she has been accused of siphoning money from the panchayat budget due to which she had to face all kind of abuses, compelling her to quit office and affected her mental health but with perseverance, she continued to fight for injustice, structural discriminations, language has also been one of the barricade and obstacle for them as some of the elected members didn't receive any education for which they were unable to request their needs causing them multiple uncertainties, the proclamation of identity. For some members getting elected was not difficult, rather after getting elected, they had to faced many discrepancies in delivering their duties throughout the process of implementation of work for sustainable development, particularly dealing with government officials while accomplishing the various schemes and government funds for the development of the villages. They were not given importance as people were skeptical on their performance and questioned their capabilities in ameliorating the administrative duties in rural villages, therefore gaining the trust of the community was difficult to achieve. They are not able to perform better due to a lack of cooperation within the village council and some Presidents failed to receive their required documents.

In Pachissi Gram Panchayat in Uttarakhand there always have been land issues, even though they had enough funds but lacked in structure of building offices. For years, women had difficulty balancing both household work and administrative work as during harvesting season, women mostly had to sleep in the fields to guard their crops against wild boars, they had to leave their children with neighbors, which's why recently they decided to install solar lamps, which was a practical resolution for them as it was hampering their political activities during the day time. There were other major challenges for the women that required immediate attention and access to health, especially maternal health, water scarcity, and proper education. In Bubnal Gram Panchayat of Maharashtra, their main challenges were caste politics and there was a mass of destruction experienced by politicians which blocked the development into the village. Water irrigation for household work and safe drinking water is one the major challenges they faced especially amid hilly areas of Uttarakhand, as all women had to walk two to three miles in a rough and narrow patch to fetch water multiple times in a day, not enough for the whole day.

All-Women Councils in Handling the Panchayats During the Pandemic

Women councils in Uttarakhand during post-COVID-19 organized the requirement measures in solving the situation in their respective villages. Hema Negi had to deal with various obstacles in arranging shelter for all the returnee migrant workers to provide safe quarantine spaces as her appeal to the administration to use one of the schools was rejected. Apparently, through discussion with the community, she managed to get an empty house, which she with all members cleaned and sanitized. In the absence of any administrative support, Negi also successfully mobilized the community to

support the workers with food rations, masks, and help with other COVID-19-related information. They even saved the government primary school from closing down during the lockdown by reaching out to people door to door to speak with children and parents of those who were studying in private schools and able to persuade them to send them to government schools to save the fee or say the expenditure, they even hired a part-time female teacher to support the students to continue their education. In Nagkorali, women leaders worked hard to ensure people were linked to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA), the largest government rural employment guarantee scheme because of which about 100 people have access to work and has able to sustain livelihood of many households during the time of Pandemic as described by Prabha Mehra, a ward member of Nagkorali Gram Panchayat, noted by (Surbhi Mahajan, March 2, 2021).

Policy On Rotational Seats for Men and Women as Panchayat Presidents

The Haryana government intends to introduce legislation to allow 50:50 reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for men and women candidates, with seats rotating between male and female representation after each term. Under the odd-even system, men and women would be permitted to run for panchayat elections. Sarpanches, members of village wards, block samiti, and zila parishads would be affected. This will ensure that men and women have equal opportunities, and women from all constituencies will have a fair amount of reservation. However, the policy of only reserving seats for one term and rotating reserved seats and chairman positions can stymie the consolidation. The proposed idea is a positive step forward. However, the government must keep in mind that gender equality in representation is insufficient to establish socio-political equality, as women's disadvantages must be taken into account. The rotational reservation has been implemented in the Autonomous District Council of Meghalaya in terms of Village Council Employee, providing equal opportunity to women, as women showed a proactive role in fulfilling governmental duties and generating funds for sustainable development growth of their villages.

4. CONCLUSION

The 73rd Amendment has facilitated women to hold government offices by including themselves in local governance and also helping themselves raise their voices on their needs. Women's participation in governing positions, marking out their own has been observed, but had to sacrifice and faced discrimination on the ground of governing and sharing power in local governance. Despite financial constraints, many Panchayats have functioned admirably now that women's participation in Panchayats is beginning to have an impact on grassroots governance, it can be claimed that the fundamentals found social revolution towards all levels of decision-making. Women have brought major social transformation and reformation in their rural roots by showing their bravery to take control of their fate, despite obstacles at

every turn, which still exist in many parts of the country but through all-women gram panchayat, they have made themselves secure in mobilizing themselves and others for proper decentralization and “perfect democracy” into their village. All-women panchayats have been an important component of women’s entrée into provincial politics. Through this study, we have observed women in all-women council gram panchayat are not inclined to oblige as dummies for their companions anymore, instead, they are inducted to be into power and can bring a tremendous change in their council and able to achieve the resources during the need of the hour. They have changed the assumption and notion that women won’t be able to perform without their male counterparts. Women are gradually gaining the confidence to transcend social stigmas as they become more conscious of their potential. The coming input from all women-run Panchayats should hopefully assist other women in mobilizing not only in these particular panchayats but also in every part of the country such as in Sixth Schedules areas, mixed panchayats to get encouraged and raise their opinion on the governing body and participate not just during an election but rather for the MP seats, Village Council President election and develop an accord in favor of preserving places for females in Parliamentary Legislature. Now it has been proven that women’s efficacy as leaders and their positive association with development is now well recognized and can be more successful with strong and collective work with consistency as well as determination of women leaders in transforming the rural roots in local governance. In conclusion, women’s collective work with persistence had massive success in reforming their rural roots and formed good governance with transparency and accountability while maintaining their tradition despite many hurdles. Hence, the implementation of rotational seats is believed to enhance gender equality through equal participation in decision-making, as seen in part of the village local government of Meghalaya, through which many women got equal opportunity, to participate in the sanitizing development of the villages.

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