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Participation Of Weaker Sections In Panchayati Raj Institutions Of Jammu And Kashmir

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Abstract:

Panchayats have been in existence since long in the country. Weaker sections, however, have not been an integral part of this system before 73rd amendment. The Panchayati Raj Act, 1992-popularly known as 73rd amendment-was enacted in the country to revitalise the panchayati raj institutions besides providing reservation to women and SCs/STs. The provisions of 73rd amendment were not extended to the State owing to the special status of Jammu and Kashmir under article 370. Panchayati raj takes democracy to the grass root level where most of the weaker sections of the community reside. The present paper has examined the participation of weaker sections i.e., women and SCs/STs in panchayati raj institutions of J&K. The objective of the paper is to examine “participation” in panchayats by assessing the participation of weaker sections in their functioning and in the village level decision-making process.

Keywords: Participation, Representation, Halqa Panchayat, Weaker Sections, decentralization, Patriarchy.

1.Introduction

Democracy is generally defined to mean a system of government in which authority in the ultimate analysis is vested in and exercised by the people. It is in this sense that the Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy as a government of the people, by the people and for the people still holds good. Judging by this criterion, the working of representative democracy of the contemporary world does not fully meet the essence of the democracy. Within the context of predominantly uneducated and less vigilant public opinion in countries like India representative institutions are by and large amenable to be misused and manipulated by well entrenched interests. Representative institutions in such a situation are likely to remain devoid of the people's hopes, aspirations and their will. In a large country like India with the inheritance of the centralised colonial administrative legacy, the real essence of people's participation in the interplay of power is likely to be missing. Our experience since the independence has gone in line with this proposition.

The panchayati raj is an indigenous and time honoured concept in our country. Its origin can be traced back to ancient ages where community spirit was the main force not only to keep village communities united but to help them manage local affairs independently. However, their formation and functional domain was socially exclusivist. The inspiration for panchayati raj is derived from the tradition of panch parmashwar where god speaks through the assembly of five. In Sanskrit, the word 'panch' stands for number five, and a body of five persons to decide upon a dispute, are called panch, 'ayat' stands for place or abode or house. In this sense, panchayat means 'an abode of panchayat members'.

Panchayati raj is capable of directly engaging people in the process of self-government at the grass root level, as the unit of the government is small enough to engage the entire population of the area in the process of its governance. In India, panchayati raj has added relevance to the diversity of its society. Small units of administration under panchayati raj can by and large go in line with various social groups that constitute the Indian society. Thus, it can guarantee more harmonious relationship in the management of socio-political affairs.

It is in the view of all these advantages that not only had Indian Constitution recognised the adoption of the panchayati raj system in India but several experiments were also conducted in various States of India in this direction in the post-independence era. The panchayati raj system came into force in independent India in 1959 after Balwant Rai Mehta committee recommendations. Panchayati raj was introduced with a belief that

people of rural India irrespective of caste, class, gender and age would participate actively in various political processes. Hence, most importantly, panchayati raj was aimed at democratising the system by decentralising the power structure.

Similarly, empowering grass root political institutions has been an old ideal of National Conference and is emphatically mentioned in the 'New Kashmir Manifesto'. This ideal was incorporated into the constitution of the State, which made it obligatory for the State to take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as a unit of self-government.

The State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has introduced various Acts regarding rural local self-governing bodies, the most important being Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act of 1989. The Act provides for a three-tier system consisting of Halqa Panchayat¹, Block Development Council and District Planning and Development Board. In addition, the Act provides for a Panchayati Adalat for every halqa. It was also mentioned that if the prescribed authority is of the opinion that women are not adequately represented in the halqa panchayat, it may nominate such number of women to be members thereof, as it may deem fit (Provided further that their number does not exceed 33 per cent of the total number of panchayat members). As far as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (SCs/STs) are concerned, there were no such special provisions kept in the Act.

Panchayats have been in existence since long in the country. Weaker sections i.e., women and SCs/STs, however, have not been an integral part of this system before 73rd amendment. The Panchayati Raj Act, 1992-popularly known as 73rd amendment-was enacted in the country to revitalise the panchayati raj institutions besides providing for reservation to women and SCs/STs. The provisions of 73rd amendment were not extended to the State owing to the special status of J&K under article 370. However, some of its provisions were incorporated, through amendments, in the State Act. Still these provisions do not bring the State Panchayat Act at par with the 73rd amendment.

India is one of the largest democracies in the world. Panchayati raj takes democracy to the grass root level where most of the weaker sections of the community reside. The rate of participation of women and SCs/STs is considerably low in the panchayati raj institutions. It has been basically due to their inadequate and ineffective participation and involvement in decentralised governance, planning and development.

After Independence, despite having a constitution, which embodies ideals like equity and equality, social justice could not be achieved so far. Even when India had a woman

Prime Minister for quite a number of years, the situation of women at large did not change for the better. Women's participation in politics remained quite insignificant in India even after 59 years of self-rule (Nanda 2006).

The question of women's representation in politics in all over the world began to assume importance since 1975 when UN declared 1975 as the 'International Women's Year'. This was followed by the UN's decade for Women (1976-1985) with the theme "Equality, Development and Peace". In India, the question of women's participation in decision-making process got the attention of the Committee for Status of Women in India (CSWI) in 1974. It was the status report by CSWI in India titled 'Towards Equality' (1974) which came as a shock to Indian women who realised that even after 27 years of independence, not only were they performing the traditional roles expected of them by men, but also had been characterised by illiteracy, poor health, marginalised employment, violence and had no role in the decision-making process in any spheres of life (Singla 2007). The national perspective plan for women (1988) has also argued that political power and access to decision making power are critical prerequisites for women's equality in the process of nation building. The scheduled castes and scheduled tribes communities have been traditionally deprived of their rights. Since Independence, variety of initiatives have been undertaken to build their capacities and mainstream them in the social and political system. But unfortunately results are far from what has been envisaged. Building leadership of the SC/ST communities in local governance institutions is one of them. They are still deprived of their powers as elected representatives. For women belonging to these communities, it is dual oppression. Traditional panchayats worked as caste communities, and were dominated by men of the village elite.

A number of elected SC/ST representatives are dependent on the elite of the village and remained answerable to them. Both male and female elected representatives, being undereducated and inexperienced, were often not allowed to carry out their mandate. The insensitivity, indifference, vested interests, abusive language and non-cooperation of other elected representatives, functionaries and officials constrained the ability of many of these elected representatives to perform better.

Women and SCs/STs represent sections that have not received support from the society in playing any form of leadership roles. In fact, quite a few dalit and women leaders were able to overcome the odds against them and have emerged as strong representatives of the village communities. The cases of successful leaders have, however, remained

isolated incidents. There have been challenges before the elected representatives from the weaker sections. The first is the legal ambiguity in the powers and functions given to the panchayats, as they have not been clearly defined in the State Panchayat Acts. The second is the caste and gender prejudices which keep the women/SCs/STs away from functioning effectively as members or chairpersons of these bodies

2.Representation Of Women And Scs/Sts In Panchayats Of Jammu Division

Despite inhospitable security environment and desperate attempts from many to thwart the attempts of the government to hold panchayat elections, the State Government succeeded in conducting panchayat elections during the first quarter of 2001 after a very long gap of 23 years. The election for the 1230 sarpanch and 10090 panch constituencies in Jammu Division was conducted in a staggered electoral process by the State Election Authority on non-party basis and with a high degree of transparency, impartiality and fairness (Sadhotra 2001).

Analysis of the information given in Table 1 in respect of Jammu Division reveals that the picture in respect of women candidates elected is quite dismal, ranging from 0.5 per cent in respect of sarpanches to 1.70 per cent in respect of panches. Samba district was created in 2006 by carving some parts from Jammu and Kathua districts and that's why missing in the above table containing results of 2001 panchayat elections in Jammu Division.

District	No. of Women Elected (Sarpanch)				No. of Women Elected (Panch)			
	SC	ST	Others	Total	SC	ST	Others	Total
Jammu	-	-	01	01	11	03	28	42
Kathua	-	-	01	01	06	01	16	23
Poonch	-	01	-	01	-	06	07	13
Udhampur	-	-	03	03	05	08	25	38
Doda	-	-	01	01	-	-	26	26
Rajouri	-	-	-	-	03	03	18	24
Total	-	01	06	07	25	21	120	166

Table 1: Number Of Women Elected As Sarpanch & Panch (Jammu Division)

Source: Reconstructed From The Information Received From Directorate Of Rural Development, Srinagar/Jammu.

The information regarding SC/ST representatives is given in Table 2. Analysis of the given information reveals that there are 29.68 percent of them elected as panches against 21 per cent sarpanches.

District	No. of Sarpanch Elected				No. of Panch Elected			
	SC	ST	Others	Total	SC	ST	Others	Total
Jammu	57	14	223	294	682	127	1634	2443
Kathua	11	03	168	182	181	83	1127	1391
Poonch	-	52	63	115	-	425	601	1026
Udhampur	17	24	171	212	270	268	1254	1792
Doda	12	14	190	216	155	164	1379	1698
Rajouri	06	45	109	160	64	465	835	1364
Total	103	152	924	1179	1352	1532	6830	9714

Table 2: Number Of SC/Sts Elected As Sarpanch & Panch (Jammu Division)

Source: Reconstructed From The Information Received From Directorate Of Rural Development, Srinagar/Jammu

The present paper has examined the participation of weaker sections i.e., women and SCs/STs in panchayati raj institutions of J&K. The halqa panchayats of Vijaypur block of Samba district are selected for the study. The objective of the paper is to examine “participation” in panchayats by assessing the participation of weaker sections in their functioning and in the village level decision-making process. For the present study, the term participation is limited to the activities of the elected representatives alone in the process of local governance. The focus of the study is also on their socio-economic profile as well as the awareness of rights and responsibilities among elected women and SC/ST representatives. This study has also tried to identify the socio-cultural factors affecting the performance of elected women and SC/ST representatives in the village decision making process.

The present study follows the pluralist line on distribution of power in society as the basic theoretical perspective. According to pluralists, represented by Robert Dahl (1961) and Nelson W Polsby (1962) and others, it was too simplistic a view to assume that the upper classes always enjoyed greater power. According to them, the distribution of power in a society was generally determined by the combination of resources and skills enjoyed by people. There are many resources other than status and wealth, which enabled people to acquire power. Besides, the skills for using one's resources are not evenly distributed nor are they necessarily acquired by one's status and wealth. Thus, not just status and wealth but a plurality of factors enabled people to acquire power. This was the pluralist view.

The Indian constitution introduced in 1950 adopted universal adult franchise, thus creating a political resource for all citizens. When the Indian parliament passed the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992 reserving 33% seats for women and for SCs/STs in proportion to their population in panchayati raj institutions, it was in a sense following the pluralist line. It was creating another resource through reservation in the hands of these deprived sections to enable them to acquire some power even if they did not enjoy high status and wealth (Barik and Sahoo 2008). Of course, occupying formal positions of power is not enough. That does not make one necessarily powerful. The real test of power, as Max Weber told categorically, is one's ability to influence decision-making in a public action affecting the community. The formal position only gave an occupant a better opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. The pluralists always emphasised the importance of studying the process of decision-making for this purpose (ibid). The universe of the undertaken study includes all the elected women and SC/ST representatives of the halqa panchayats of Jammu Division. The empirical data for the paper have been collected from the halqa panchayats of Vijaypur Block of Samba district of Jammu and Kashmir. The sampling method which is used to select area of study is area sampling and purposive sampling method is used to draw sample from the elected representatives of halqa panchayats of Vijaypur block. Out of 10 districts of Jammu Division, Samba district has been selected and out of 4 blocks of Samba district, Vijaypur block is selected for study through area sampling.

The area sampling method is one version of cluster sampling and is also known as geographical cluster sampling. This sampling implies dividing population into geographical clusters and drawing random sample from all geographical clusters or selected ones. In the present study, Jammu Division is taken as primary geographical

cluster. Jammu Division has 10 districts which are considered as secondary geographical clusters and Samba district has been selected randomly out of these secondary geographical clusters. Samba district is further divided into 4 blocks which are considered as tertiary geographical clusters and Vijaypur block is selected randomly from these tertiary geographical clusters.

The sample for the present study has been drawn from the women and SC/ST representatives as well as elected general members from halqa panchayats of Vijaypur block by the use of purposive sampling. In the entire halqa panchayats of Vijaypur block, there are 49 SCs, 9 STs and 4 women representatives. The sample size is 40 and it includes 4 women, 5 STs, 20 SCs and 11 general members. Some general members were interviewed to know their perception about elected women and SCs/STs as well as to know their views on reservation for weaker sections.

Young (1966) argues that the most important consideration in selecting a sample is to see that it is closely representative of the universe. The size of the sample is no necessary insurance of its representativeness. Relatively small samples properly selected may be much more reliable than large samples poorly selected. A good sample must be representative of the universe or population. A good sample also must be adequate in size in order to be reliable.

The data was collected from primary as well as secondary sources. In order to collect the primary data, the structured interview was carried out. With the decision of applying structured interviewing technique, the construction of interview schedule was also required. Four different interview schedules for women, SCs, STs and general representatives were used to achieve objectives of the present research. Before finalising the interview schedule a pilot study was conducted to know about the gaps left in the construction of the interview schedule. The secondary data collection had started from the beginning of the study and continued almost till the end. It included consultation of various books, articles, journals, Government reports and other reports.

3. Concepts Used

3.1. Weaker Sections

The term 'weaker sections' brings within its ambit those who suffer from physical, economic and social deprivation and face discrimination on basis of caste, creed and patriarchy namely the SCs, STs, women, the differently able and other backward

classes. For the purpose of present study, the term 'weaker sections' implies women and SCs/STs only. It is because under 73rd amendment, there should be reservation for women and SCs/STs compulsorily in panchayati raj institutions whereas reservation for other backward classes is left to the sole discretion of State governments. In J&K, there are no special provisions for representation of other backward classes in State Panchayati Raj Act. Thus the present study focused only on women and SCs/STs representation in panchayati raj institutions of J&K.

3.2.Participation

Participation has long been acknowledged as a central theme of democratic governance. Democracy offers the citizens an opportunity to elect and subsequently dispose the governments through the electoral process. In such a liberal democratic framework, people are expected to participate only by expressing their mandate, and the scope of participation ends with the electoral process (Schumpeter 1942). However, such a narrow vision of participation undermines public involvement and minimizes peoples' role in decision-making process. Now scholars disagree with Schumpeterian narrow version of participation.

Political participation in a democracy has got a wider connotation now, which ranges from popular participation in electing representatives to the actual participation of representatives in the process of governance. Verba, Schzoman and Brady (1993) define political participation in democratic context as those activities, which have "the intent or effect of influencing government action - either directly by the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies"

Participation in the 1990's, with the emphasis of reservation policies at the levels of local government, has become both a right in itself and a means for ensuring effective governance. Thus, as a political concept as well as a process, participation has got a dynamic implication with the recent policies of devolution, where people are not only expected to voice their opinions in elections, but also enjoy the power to participate in the actual decision-making process.

In the present study, the participation is used in the context of role of elected representatives from weaker sections in the actual decision making process in panchayati raj institutions.

3.3. Decentralisation

Decentralisation has assumed a central role in matters of governance in the developing world over the last few years. The major promise of democratic decentralisation is that it brings popular participation and accountability to local governance, and therefore, makes local governance more responsive to citizens' desires and more effective in delivering services (Blair 2000).

Decentralised democratic governance is being regarded as "both a right in itself and a means of ensuring basic human rights observance" (Gloppen et al 2003). Gloppen definition of decentralisation is taken as the reference in the present study. The commitment towards popular participation in governance at the local level has been reinforced through recent policies of affirmative action. In 1992, the Government of India passed the 73rd and 74th amendment to adopt a decentralised model of governance. The amendments activated local governments by making it mandatory to conduct regular elections at the village, block, district and town level and significantly devolving powers and resources to these elected bodies. To strengthen participation and inclusion, the amendments mandate the reservation of seats for women and scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and that all rural local governments (panchayats) hold gram sabhas (village meetings) at regular intervals.

3.4. Key Findings

The major findings, which emerge from the present study, are presented below in various sections.

4. Social, Economic And Political Profile

For the present study, the social, economic and political factors have been taken as one of the antecedent factors influencing women and SC/ST participation in panchayats.

4.1. Age-Wise Composition

The study reveals that 75% of elected women were above the age of 50 years. That shows that younger women are not joining politics. The reason may be the process of adjustment in the new settings as post-marriage hamper active participation in the elections, while middle age women are adjusted to the system and could come out of private sphere more actively. In case of SC panchayat representatives, 45% of them belong to the young age groups, 20% to middle age groups and 35% to older age

groups². Thus, the young members from SC community are more actively participating in comparison to middle and old age members of their community. As far as ST panchayat representatives were concerned, 80% of elected STs belong to middle age groups and only 20% to older age group. The age composition of panchayat representatives from weaker sections is given below in Table 3.

AgeGroup(in Years)	Number of Respondents			Percentage		
	Women	SC	ST	Women	SC	ST
21-30	-	1	-	-	5	-
31-40	-	8	-	-	40	-
41-50	1	4	2	25	20	40
51-60	2	-	2	50	-	40
61-70	-	5	1	-	25	20
71-80	1	2	-	25	10	-
Total	4	20	5	100	100	100

Table 3:Age-Wise Distribution Of The Women And SC/ST Panchayat Representatives

4.2.Educational Background

Regarding educational background, it was found that only 25% women and 10% SC panchayat representatives were illiterate. The rest of the panchayat representatives were educated at least upto primary level. Even about 25% women, 10% SC and 20% ST panchayat representatives were educated upto graduation and above. The data pertaining to educational background is given below in Table 4.

Education Level	Number of Respondents			Percentage		
	Women	SC	ST	Women	SC	ST
Illiterate	1	2	-	25	10	-
Primary	1	5	1	25	25	20
Middle	-	4	1	-	20	20
10 th	1	4	2	25	20	40
Higher secondary	-	3	-	-	15	-
Graduate and above	1	2	1	25	10	20
Total	4	20	5	100	100	100

Table 4:Educational Level Of Women And SC/ST Panchayat Representatives

4.3. Occupation Classification

A large majority (75%) of the women representatives were housewives while SC/ST representatives were engaged in diverse occupations. It has been found that, 30% SC panchayat representatives were cultivators, 35% run their own business, 15% were ex-servicemen and 15% were service providers. In the case of STs panchayat representatives, 60% of them were cultivators, 20% were service provider and 20% were ex-servicemen. The occupational classification of women and SC/ST panchayat members is given in Table 5 and Table 6.

Occupation	Number of Women	Percentage
Housewife	3	75
Social Service	1	25
Full Time Politician	-	-
Cultivator	-	-
Agricultural Labourer	-	-
Wage Labour (Non-farm)	-	-
Total	4	100

Table 5: Occupational Classification Of Women Panchayat Representatives

Occupation	Number of Respondents		Percentage	
	SC	ST	SC	ST
Cultivator	6	3	30	60
Agricultural Labourer	-	-	-	-
Full Time Politician	-	-	-	-
Service provider	3	1	15	20
Business	7	-	35	-
Ex-servicemen	3	1	15	20
Wage Labourer (Non-farm)	1	-	5	-
Total	20	5	100	100

Table 6: Occupational Classification Of SC/ST Panchayat Representatives

4.4. Annual Household Income

The study reveals that the women representatives of halqa panchayats had sound economic background. About 75% of them had annual family income more than 1,20,001. In the case of SCs/STs elected members, 60% of elected SCs/STs had annual family income between 24,001 and 72,000. Thus the economic condition of SCs/STs elected members is far better than their counterparts in other States. The information regarding household income is provided in Table 7.

Annual Family Income (Rs.)	Number of Respondents			Percentage		
	Women	SC	ST	Women	SC	ST
Less than 24,000	-	3	1	-	15	20
24,001-48,000	-	6	2	-	30	40
48,001-72,000	1	6	1	25	30	20
72,001-96,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
96,001-1,20,000	-	3	-	-	15	-
1,20,001 and above	3	2	1	75	10	20
Total	4	20	5	100	100	100

Table 6: Annual Household Income Of Women And SC/ST Panchayat Representatives

4.5. Political Background

The study reveals that 25% women elected members had no political background, 25% were political workers, 25% had member from affinal family in politics and 25% had members from natal as well as affinal family in politics. Since there was no provision of reservation in Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act, 1989 in 2001 and thus such type of picture is very much understandable. In the case of SC/ST elected panchayat members, 90% SCs and 100% ST panchayat representatives had no political background. The data pertaining to political background has been given in Table 7 and 8.

Political Background	Number of Women	Percentage
Nil	1	25
Political worker	1	25
Husband ex-sarpanch or ex-politician	-	-
Any other family member from affinal family in politics or Panchayat representative	-	-
Any member from natal family in politics or Panchayat representative	1	25
Members from affinal as well as natal family in politics or Panchayat representative	1	25
Total	4	100

Table 7: Political Background Of Women Panchayat Representatives

Political Background	Number of Respondents		Percentage	
	SC	ST	SC	ST
Nil	18	5	90	100
Political worker	-	-	-	-
Ex-Panchayat member	2	-	10	-
Any other family member in politics/panchayat representative	-	-	-	-
Total	20	5	100	100

Table 8: Political Background Of SC/ST Panchayat Representatives

5. Awareness Of Women Panchayat Representatives

There is a general impression that elected women have negligible role in participation and their awareness level is low. Most of them stand only due to reservation. In the present case, there was no provision for women reservation (when elections were held), so it can be assumed that elected women panchayat members would show higher degree of participation and awareness.

5.1. Political Awareness

Awareness about the prevailing political system is essential for the functioning of the members to enhance and facilitate their performance. The political awareness of women members was good. The political awareness of the elected members has been studied through the following components like awareness about the tenure of halqa panchayats ,

women's quota, etc. It has been found that all the elected women members of respective panchayats knew the tenure of halqa panchayats as well as about the 33% reservation in the coming panchayat elections. Although they were aware of the 33% reservation but they didn't have any idea about the 73rd amendment and how it is different from the present system of reservation in halqa panchayats of J&K. All women representatives support reservation and consider it as the necessary instrument to increase their representation from present negligible level.

5.2.Awareness About Development Programmes

The awareness about the development programmes and schemes undertaken in their respective panchayats was fairly good. All women members were aware about the developmental programmes undertaken by their panchayats. Regarding specific programmes all the representatives knew about Mahatama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme and Indra Awaas Yojna while only 50% knew about Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojna and Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna. Only 25% were aware of Integrated Watershed Development Programme. The data regarding awareness about specific programmes is give in Table 9.

Development Programmes	Number of Women gave Affirmative Response	Percentage
Mahatama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme	4	100
Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojna	2	50
Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna	2	50
Indra Awaas Yojna	4	100
Integrated Watershed Development Programme- Haryali	1	25

Table 9: Awareness About Specific Development Programmes

Note: The Number Of Responses Shown In The Table Are More Than Four As This Was A Multiple Choice Question And One Respondent Gave More Than One Response

5.3.Awareness Of SC/ST Panchayat Representatives

5.3.1.Political Awareness

Political awareness of SC/ST representatives is very important for the performance of leadership roles and thus questions were asked like awareness about reservation, tenure of halqa panchayats, etc. The political awareness of SC/ST representatives was quite sufficient. All the SC/ST representatives knew about the tenure of panchayats. It was also found that about 70% of SC representatives and 80% of ST representatives were aware about the reservation in the coming panchayat elections. Although they were aware of the reservation but they didn't have any idea about the 73rd amendment. The data regarding their awareness about reservation is given below in Table 10.

Response	Number of Respondents		Percentage	
	SC	ST	SC	ST
Yes	14	4	70	80
No	6	1	30	20
Total	20	5	100	100

Table 10: Awareness About Reservation In Halqa Panchayats

5.3.2.Awareness About Development Programmes

The awareness about the development programmes undertaken in their respective panchayats was good. It was found that all respondents were aware about the development programmes. Regarding specific development programmes that are being implemented in their respective panchayats, all the representatives knew about Mahatama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme and almost all respondents were aware of Indra Awaas Yojna while only 60% SC and 80% ST representatives knew about Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna. The awareness about Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojna and Integrated Watershed Development Programme was not very high. The information about their awareness regarding development programmes is given below in Table 11.

Development Programmes	Number of SC/ST Representatives gave Affirmative Response		Percentage	
	SC	ST	SC	ST
Mahatama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme	20	5	100	100
Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojna	6	3	30	60
Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna	12	4	60	80
Indira Awaas Yojna	19	5	95	100
Integrated Watershed Development Programme- Haryali	6	2	30	40

Table 11: Awareness About Specific Development Programmes

Note: The Number Of Responses Shown In The Table Are More Than Four As This Was A Multiple Choice Question And One Respondent Gave More Than One Response

6. Participation Of Women Representatives

The analysis of women's participation was carried out with the help of various indicators like participation in village affairs before elections, attending training programmes, raising of issues independently, etc.

6.1. Involvement In Village Affairs

Representatives interest in local affairs is an important indicator of their effective participation. In the present study, it was found that 50% of the women representatives were involved in village affairs before panchayat elections while 50% did not took any part in village affairs before electing in halqa panchayats. The data regarding women involvement in local affairs is given in Table 12.

Response	Number of Women	Percentage
Yes	2	50
No	2	50
Total	4	100

Table 12: Involvement In Village Affairs

7.Attendance In Panchayat Meetings

The performance of women representatives depend on their attendance in panchayat meetings. It was found that all the respondents attend panchayat meetings and they did raise issues independently in panchayat meetings.

7.1.Source Of Assistance In Panchayat Wor

Regarding the source of assistance in doing their panchayat duties, it was found that all the women members were doing their duties independently. They were not taking the help of their husbands/family members or any other. But this should not be mistaken as an indicator of women's empowerment as a whole because the representation of women is very less due to absence of reservation. This can be appropriately tested only after women in adequate numbers from diverse backgrounds contest elections.

Regarding support of government officials in the implementation of development programmes, their responses were positive. They didn't have any complaints from government officials. Although some of the women leaders (50%) complaint about favouritism in the identification of beneficiaries. This is due to their negligible representation in panchayats and the absence of training programmes for women members. But despite of all difficulties, all the women respondents agreed that there has been change in their socio-economic status due to their mere election to local bodies. They said that there has been increase in awareness about the problems of women and they pressed for their solutions effectively due to their representation in local self-governing bodies.

8.Participation Of SC/ST Representatives

The analysis of SC/ST representatives' participation was also carried out with the help of various indicators like participation in village affairs before elections, attending training programmes, raising of issues independently, etc.

8.1.Involvement In Village Affairs

In the present study, it was found that 80% of the SC and 100% ST representatives were involved in village affairs before panchayat elections. The data pertaining to their involvement in village affairs is given below in Table 13.

Response	Number of Respondents		Percentage	
	SC	ST	SC	ST
Yes	16	5	80	100
No	4	-	20	-
Total	20	5	100	100

Table 13: Involvement In Village Affairs

8.2. Attendance In Panchayat Meetings

The performance of SC/ST representatives depend on their attendance in panchayat meetings because it is the necessary condition for their participation. It was found that almost all the SC (95%) and ST (100%) respondents attend panchayat meetings. They raised issues independently in panchayat meeting. This reflects upon their active participation in decision making in panchayats. The information about their attendance is given below in Table 14.

Response	Number of Respondents		Percentage	
	SC	ST	SC	ST
Yes	19	5	95	100
Sometimes	1	-	5	-
No	-	-	-	-
Total	20	5	100	100

Table 14: Sc/St Representatives Response To Their Attendance In Panchayat Meetings

8.3. Change In Socio-Economic Status Through Political Participation

Most of the respondents agreed that there has been change in the socio-economic status of SC/ST representatives due to the working of panchayats. About 95% SC and 80% ST representatives answered in affirmative regarding this query. But still most of the respondents thought that they were not fully involved in formulation of development schemes. This problem is also faced by panchayat members of other sections because the local rural bodies have not been given adequate powers in Jammu and Kashmir. The information about their views on change in socio-economic status is given below in Table 15.

Response	Number of Respondents		Percentage	
	SC	ST	SC	ST
Yes	19	4	95	80
No	1	1	5	20
Total	20	5	100	100

Table 15: Change In The Socio-Economic Status Of SC/ST With The Working Of PRI's

9. Problems Faced By Women Representatives

9.1. Problems faced in doing panchayat work

Regarding problems faced in carrying out panchayat work, economic/financial problems was the main problem mentioned by all women representatives. They said that there is scarcity of financial resources for carrying out necessary panchayat works. Lack of education and awareness were also some of the problems mentioned by 50% and 25% women panchayat representatives respectively. Panchayati raj institutions lack resources in J&K as financial powers like imposition of taxes, regular funds availability, etc. are not transferred to these self-governing bodies. This problem faced by all the panchayat members irrespective of caste, class, gender, etc. The data regarding problems faced while doing panchayat work is given below in Table 16

Response	Number of Women gave Affirmative Response	Percentage
Economic/financial problem	4	100
Lack of awareness	1	25
Lack of education	2	50
Interference of government officials/non cooperation	-	-
Political interference/groupism	-	-
Others like family problems/traditional values, etc.	-	-
Don't face any problem	-	-

Table 16: Problems Faced In Panchayat Work

Note: The Number Of Responses Shown In The Table Are More Than Four As This Was A Multiple Choice Question And One Respondent Gave More Than One Response

9.2. Problems In Attending Panchayat Meetings

In the present study it was found that majority (75%) of women panchayat members didn't mention any problem in regularly attending panchayat meetings while rest mentioned lack of education as the main problem in their regular attendance in panchayat meetings. It was according to expectations as majority of them regularly attend panchayat meetings and their awareness regarding panchayat meetings was also good. As far as the education is concerned, it was also emphasised by most of the panchayat representatives that minimum educational qualification should be made mandatory requirement for contesting panchayat election.

10. Problems Faced By SC/ST Representatives

10.1. Role Of Dominant Castes In Deciding Their Candidature

The role of the dominant castes and factions cannot be denied or underestimated in politics at the grassroots level. Caste system is a dark reality of Indian society since ages. The dominant castes have been exploiting and dominating the lower castes. But due to affirmative action in education and employment opportunities, there has been gradual change in socio-economic status of lower castes. The processes of industrialisation, urbanisation, westernisation and sanskritisation have been diluting caste rigidities.

In the present study, it was found that most of the SC/ST panchayat representatives didn't mention any role of dominant castes in deciding their candidature. Only 10% SC contestants agreed that their candidature is decided by dominant castes while 5% SC and 40% ST representatives responded that mutual consent is taken for deciding candidature. Here it must be mentioned that the wards from where they contested have dominant caste / group population in small number. So that is the main reason for dominant castes / group no direct role in deciding their candidature. Another reason may be due to the moderating influence of Islam on other communities in Jammu and Kashmir as it is based on the principle of social equality. Being dominant religion of Jammu and Kashmir, it makes caste inequalities less rigid in comparison to other Indian States. The information about dominant caste role in deciding their candidature is given below in Table 17.

Response	Number of Respondents		Percentage	
	SC	ST	SC	ST
Yes	2	-	10	-
No	17	3	85	60
Mutual consent	1	2	5	40
Total	20	5	100	100

Table 17: Perception Of SC/ST Representatives' Regarding Role Of Dominant Castes/Groups Role In Deciding Their Candidature

10.2. Difficulties In Attending Panchayat Meetings

Regarding difficulties encountered by the SC/ST leaders in regularly attending the panchayat meetings, it was found that 40% SC and 60% ST representatives did not mention any problem while 40% SC and 20% ST representatives mentions lack of incentives as the main problem for their active participation. Rest 35% SC and 40% ST representatives mentioned education as the main problem in regular attendance. The data regarding difficulties faced in attending panchayat meetings is given in Table 18.

Difficulties in attending the meetings regularly	Number of SC/ST Representatives gave Affirmative Response		Percentage	
	SC	ST	SC	ST
Fear of dominant caste/groups	-	-	-	-
Lack of incentives	8	1	40	20
Lack of education/awareness	7	2	35	40
No problem	8	3	40	60

Table 18: Difficulties In Regularly Attending Panchayat Meetings

Note: The Number Of Responses Shown In The Table Are More Than Four As This Was A Multiple Choice Question And One Respondent Gave More Than One Response.

Thus, both the negative as well as the positive features of women and SC/ST representatives' participation and performance must be kept in mind to reduce their problems and strengthen their capacity to perform their envisaged functions and role in the panchayati raj institutions. The analysis of women and SCs/STs elected panchayat members' awareness, participation and performance in panchayat activities showed that

given their background and prevailing situations, their level of awareness and degree of participation can be regarded as satisfactory.

11.General Panchayat Members Perception About Elected Women And Sc/St Members

One interview schedule exclusively deal with the perception of elected general members about women and SC/ST elected panchayat members. The elected general members were asked certain questions like their views towards reservation, role of caste factor in elections and voting behaviour, performance of women and SC/ST members,etc.

11.1.Role Of Caste In Village Politics

It has been found in various studies that the dominant castes/groups exercised considerable influence in grass root politics. They played active role in deciding the candidature of SCs/STs and in their winning elections as well. In the present study, it was found that the most of the elected general candidates (81.8%) denied the role of dominant castes in deciding the candidature of SC/ST members. The main reason given was the respective majority of SCs/STs in the wards from where they contested panchayat elections and thus the upper castes did not play any role in deciding the candidature of SC/ST members. In the absence of reservation, most of the SCs/STs preferred to contest elections from wards where they were in majority. The data regarding their perception in this matter is given below in Table 19.

Response	Number of	Percentage
Yes	2	18.2
No	9	81.8
Total	11	100

Table 19: Perception Of Elected General Representatives' Regarding Role Of Dominant Caste/Group Role In Deciding SC/ST Candidature

Regarding the role of caste in voting patterns, the majority (91%) of the general members replied in negative. They reveals that the whole village voted for the SC/ST members but this could be due to the relative majority of SCs/STs in respective panch

and sarpanch constituencies. This information about impact of caste on voting behavior is given below in Table 20.

Response	Number of	Percentage
Yes	1	9
No	10	91
Total	11	100

Table 20: Voting And Campaigning Being Caste/Community Based

11.3. Views On Performance Of Women And SC/ST Members

On the question related to the performance of women and SC/ST members, it has been found that all the respondents replied in affirmative. They were satisfied with the performance of elected women and SC/ST members. But one has to keep in mind that the awareness and participation of women and SC/ST members was satisfactory because they contested elections in the absence of reservation. Most of the elected women and SC/ST members were already involved in village affairs before their elections to panchyats. Most of the general candidates (91%) have no problem in accepting women and SC/ST members as sarpanch of their respective panchayats. But some of them have reservations regarding acceptance of women and SC/ST members as sarpanch. Few respondents were of the view that the chances of their election as sarpanch are rare and also they cannot provide effective leadership. The data regarding their readiness to accept women or SC/ST as sarpanch is given below in Table 21.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	10	91
No	1	9
Total	11	100

Table 21: Readiness To Accept Women Or SC/ST As Sarpanch

11.4. Opinion On Reservation

Regarding the opinion of general candidates about reservation, it has been found that their responses were mixed. More than half of the respondents (54.5%) favoured reservation on the ground that there is need of adequate representation of women and

SC/ST members so that diverse perspectives manifest in local self-governing bodies. But many respondents (45.5%) were against reservation because they thought due to affirmative action in jobs and educational sector, the status of weaker sections has changed considerably. They asserts that women and SC/ST need to be encouraged to contest on open competition. They were in favour of empowerment of panchayati raj institutions because the devolution of powers is of prime concern to them and considered as the remedy of all loopholes. The information about their views regarding reservation is given in Table 22

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	6	54.5
No	5	45.5
Total	11	100

Table 22: Supporting Reservation For Women And Scs/Sts In Panchayats

Thus it has been found that the role of caste in J&K grass root politics is limited as inferred from the opinion of general candidates. The performance of elected women and SC/ST members is satisfactory and general candidates have no objection in accepting them as sarpanch of their respective panchayats.

11.5. Panchayat Elections 2011

The panchayat elections in Jammu and Kashmir are held after a gap of 10 years and process began in early 2011. The last panchayat elections were conducted in the State in 2001-02 after a gap of 23 years.

The panchayat elections are held for the election of 4130 sarpanches and 29,719 panches. These panchayat elections create great enthusiasm among rural masses. Rural masses have shown great interest and participated vigorously in these panchayat elections. Over 79 percent of the electorate exercised their right to vote.

These panchayat elections are significant on the account of various factors:

First, these elections have great significance for women and SCs/STs because there is a provision of 33% reservation for women and for SCs/STs in accordance to their population in panch constituencies.

Secondly, the three tiers of panchayati raj institutions will be activated all over the State after panchayat elections for the first time.

Thirdly, although there are various loopholes in J&K Panchayati Raj Act but government has taken many steps to empower panchayati raj institutions. Civil society and various political parties have been demanding the extension of 73rd amendment to the State. Jammu and Kashmir government has recently constituted empowered committee under the chairmanship of chief secretary to deliberate on the transfer of subjects to panchayats. This committee gave wider recommendations and government has shown its keenness in implementing these recommendations in letter and spirit.

12. Conclusion

In the end, one can say that women and SCs/STs are not totally neglected in the political sphere. Although their representation in totality is not very effective but they were self-motivated and determined to contest. But government need to empower grass root institutions and implement the 73rd amendment in letter and spirit. It is only because of this that adequate representation of all sections of people would be possible at the grass root level. Ultimately it would encourage the alienated masses to come into the mainstream of nation building and restore the real democracy.

13. Notes

1 In Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act 1989, halqa panchayat is the first tier of PRIs and is same as gram panchayat constituted under 73rd amendment in other States of India
2 For the present study, young age groups are 21-30 and 31-40; middle age groups are 41-50 and 51-60; older age groups are 61-70 and above.

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