

Women in Panchayat Offices of Rajasthan- Effect on Their Public and Private Domains, and Functioning of Caste and Gender Intersectionalities

Niharika Pandey

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad, h2021ws020@stud.tiss.edu

WOMEN IN PANCHAYAT OFFICES OF RAJASTHAN- EFFECT ON THEIR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DOMAINS, AND FUNCTIONING OF CASTE AND GENDER INTERSECTIONALITIES

Abstract: Rajasthan pioneered the *Panchayati Raj* (council of five elected members) Act by providing 50% quota to the women belonging to the marginalized sections under the Rajasthan *Panchayati Raj* (Second Amendment) Bill, 2008 to improve the political participation of women in the rural local self-government. In this paper, I have analyzed the effects of holding positions in the private and public domains of the elected women representatives (EWRs) and the subtle but powerful practice of caste and gender intersectionalities. Under the constructivist paradigm, the data collected through the semi-structured interview of 22 EWRs and 9 appointed women officials were thematically analyzed. It was found that women are still used as ‘seat warmers’ or ‘proxy’ leaders which highlights the ineffective role of the state. The patriarchal practices perpetrated through caste and gender intersectionalities make women vulnerable to silent violence by recognizing their primary role as domestic workers and caregivers and their veiled faces with silent mouths as ‘present’ in the village office. The instrumental value of the male representatives (MRs) makes the state a perpetrator of this violence. The improved training and accountability of the elected women members in the office and working beyond implementing the government schemes will enable holistic women empowerment.

Keywords: *Panchayat*, elected women representatives, private and public spheres, caste and gender intersectionalities

The Panchayati Raj

Panchayat, a group of five respected elders of a community, is a space for conflict resolution and smooth governance in a village. It forms an integral part of the local governance in Indian socio-economic-political system necessary to maintain the law and order of/amongst the community/communities residing in the village. Unfortunately, it is being misused to maintain the hegemony of patriarchy and casteism. In 1992, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, gave the constitutional status to the local self-governments at rural and urban levels respectively. The act included the provision of 33 percent quota for women, Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) members, and SC and ST women members. The quota envisioned increased participation, and representation of these marginalized sections of the society with their consequential emancipation and empowerment. The inclusion of the 73rd amendment act was a major step towards increasing democratization in the federal structure of the constitution because this Amendment acted as “a watershed in deepening democratic local governance” (Buch, 2010, p. 1) as it ensured guaranteed representation of the marginalized groups in the political arena of Indian constitution.

According to the United Nations (n.d.), “empowerment is active participation in decision- making, equal opportunity, economic freedom, and the right to give opinion, access to the productive resources that can make enable to increase the earnings. It is giving the strength to fight against any inequalities and getting self-respect and confidence”. The panchayat is an important arena to study the perpetration of the patriarchal and cast norms and how they act as the biggest hurdle in the journey of empowering

the marginalized sections. The aim of this study is to focus upon the first tier of the panchayati raj institution.

The study will move ahead as follows. Under the section review of literature, the main themes are women and private sphere, implications of the state intervention through quota on their private and public spheres, caste and gender intersectionalities, and electoral participation: why people vote and need to see beyond quantifiable presence of women in politics. The next sections are the methodology adopted to conduct the study, the findings and their thematic analysis including a case study, discussion of the findings and way forward.

Review of literature

Women and private sphere

An important aspect of family dynamics is the hold of power. Feminists discuss the ‘bottom-up’ flow of marital power and highlight “the quality of power and on underlying power processes rather than the usual emphasis on the quantity of power and observable behavioral outcomes” (Osmond & Thorne, 1993, p. 602). The patriarchal set-up of the family has ingrained certain ideologies in the society which have become commonsensical to the extent that even the victim allows the hegemonic hierarchy to sustain and in fact become the perpetrator of the same. We find that women in families are used as subjects to exercise the patriarchal functions through religious services, traditional and cultural norms. Women who are home-based workers, can be conceptualised as trapped in socially encoded constructs that essentialize women’s primary location within the domestic sphere (Raju. S, 2013, p. 60).

Osmond & Thorne (1993) discuss how gender is structured in our society, where it affects the society not only in the social category but also the individual, collective, and organizational identities. Women have always been identified as someone’s daughter, wife, mother, or grand-mother. These identities have crossed the private sphere and affect public identities of women as well. It is not rare when women in political domain are identified as *didi*, *amma*, or *behen*. They are not recognized as an individual political leader capable of exercising politics on her own. With the state interventions, which are majorly patriarchal, women have been able to become a part of the political and economic spheres of the social organization. The patriarchal nature of politics in the society forces women to carry the identity of political dynasties they belong to and are compelled to follow the ideology on which the family has been running its politics for years. Women are affected by the norms and conditions regulated within the private sphere, also in the public domain.

The implications of the state intervention through quota on private and public spheres of women

The guarantee of 33% quota in the act encouraged politically active families to utilize women in continuing hegemonic rule. As discussed in *Decentralization and Local Governments: The Indian Experience* (edited by T.R. Raghunandan 2012) when a seat is reserved for a woman belonging to a particular caste, say only a woman belonging to ST category can become the sarpanch or ward member of a panchayat or a ward respectively, women are used as seat warmers or proxy leaders. The shape shifting patriarchy, hence, ‘allows’ women to become an elected representative. The actual power lies with the MR of that EWR, locally known as *sarpanch pati/pradhan pati/nivedak*. This only derogates the dignity of women and their citizenship is “subsumed in the claims made on their persons and liberty by their families, kin and communities” (Geetha, 2007, p.112). The quotas have not only impacted their private spheres as discussed above, but women suffer from a discriminatory attitude towards them in

exercising “public-political power” (Devika and Thampi, 2012, p. xvii). Discussing the ideas exchanged in a conference held in Tamil Nadu on the theme, '50 years of Indian independence: Women and Political Participation', Geetha (2007) reveals that “women were not viewed as effective citizens or public figures: they would be allotted specific propaganda tasks or assigned roles within the 'women's wings' of various parties but they were seldom entrusted with general political responsibilities” (p. 126). These ideas might have been shared in the year 1997, but we still find that EWRs are assigned to the working committees which are oriented towards health, education, and woman and child welfare. The patriarchal system, hence, formed enables men, from dominant caste, to take an advantage of their networking based on kin and caste relations. Women and people belonging to ‘lower castes’ do not have this advantage of networking which is crucial to achieve, hold, and maintain the political power within the public sphere. Women are expected to dedicate themselves to their marital homes physically, emotionally, and mentally. The quota in the act has tried to give political empowerment to women, but has been unable to address the social system.

Caste and gender intersectionalities

The Amendment Act of 1992 plays a significant role such that the SC and ST women candidates get elected unopposed where a village or a ward has homogenous community. However, it becomes difficult in a heterogeneous community when there is a reserved seat for an SC/ST woman because of the caste and gender identity the elected woman holds. Language barrier, literacy level, and discriminatory attitudes of dominant castes push the panchayat members belonging to vulnerable sections to gain low level of or no knowledge about the basic functions, roles, and responsibilities of a sarpanch or a member. In a study conducted by Kumari & Singh (2015) on ‘role performance by elected women members of the panchayat’ the results showed that more than caste, education, and political influence of the member, the level of participation is the major causal factor behind the acceptance of elected members for the next term in the office. The participation increases when women do not have any restricted mobility (Ciotti, 2009), have property rights, and are free to develop a lifestyle of their own. However, women belonging to lower caste become the bearer of the burden of their gender and caste identities.

The Electoral Participation: why people vote and looking beyond quantifiable presence of women in politics

Benjamin Powis (2003) discusses about major factors (ranked accordingly) behind people voting for a particular candidate like presence of party politics, qualities in a nominee, development, and caste. The foothold of a political party at local levels play a decisive role in the election results of a panchayat. A sarpanch is examined on the qualities like: including all the communities, treating everyone with fairness, leadership skills, and capacity and capabilities to bring positive changes. Strong political affiliation also carries important weightage. Alignment to a particular caste comes natural to a village. The voters, in lieu of personal benefits, tend to vote for the candidate belonging to their castes. These factors, in addition to the 33% quota, have helped women to at least hold political positions in the government records. The superficial increased participation of women in politics has been limited to the quantifiable data. The participation is also lauded on the basis of their attendance in monthly meetings, their physical presence in the meetings with the bureaucrats at the panchayat samiti and the district council, or in the inaugural ceremonies of a project. Devika and Thampi (2012) argue that we need to go beyond these quantitative variables to measure the participation of women, instead attention should be given “to empowerment indicators to probe their mobility, access to economic resources and

information, networking, changes in self-image and self-esteem, changes in their bargaining power within the household” (p. xviii).

Methodology

Framework on feminist theories and methodologies

The feminist theorists, during 1960s and 1970s, had successfully highlighted the gaps in research methodologies which avoided the subjective realities of women and marginalized their experiences. They also were able to uphold the intersectionalities of women, as against the understanding of ‘common gender issues’. With this, the feminist methodology became an important tool in the academia challenging the existing methodologies like positivist approach. I have made an attempt to implement this framework to the core by capturing the unique experiences of women in the panchayat offices.

Standpoint theory

“Feminist Standpoint epistemology is a unique philosophy of knowledge building that challenges us to see and understand the world through the eyes and experiences of oppressed women, and apply the vision and knowledge of oppressed to social activism and social change. It is both a theory of knowledge building and a method of a doing research- an approach to knowledge construction and a call to political action” (Brooks, 2007). Intemann (2016) in her paper Feminist Standpoint discusses Smith (1997), Rolin (2009) and Kourany (2012) on how “standpoint theory is a methodological resource for understanding power structures and producing knowledge that is more likely to benefit marginalized groups”. Using this theory, I have tried to capture and analyse the subjective experiences of women participants in my study. I have not only used the responses to the questionnaire to discuss the objectives of this study, but have also relied on my observations during the interview sessions. Through this theory, I have tried to highlight the existing lip service to the political representation and participation of women, and the inability of the same to bring positive changes in their private and public spheres. The caste and gender intersectionalities have been studied upon by using this theory as-fundamental to the analysis.

The undertaken research study works within the constructivist paradigm. The study has undertaken qualitative method of data collection through purposive sampling of elected women sarpanchas, elected ward members, and appointed panchayat officials. The data collected through semi-structured interviews have undergone thematic analysis. The research sites were Sanganer and Chaksu constituencies of Jaipur district of Rajasthan.

Findings

There are total 30 respondents who can be categorized as- elected women sarpanchas (11 in number), elected women ward members (11 in number) and appointed women officials (9 in number). The names of the respondents will not be used in findings, analysis, and discussion due to confidentiality. They will be referred to as following: Elected women sarpanchas as **Sn**, elected women ward members as **Wn**, and appointed women officials as **On**; (here ‘n’ refers to a number). All of them are married women except O2 who is a widow. The basic demographic details and important categories are annexed at the last.

The participants were questioned on their personal background, and any change in relationships within the personal spheres. They were questioned about the ways of formal and informal engagements with the males in the public and private spheres. Under the formal engagements, they were also asked about the routine governance of the panchayat office, which indicated their level of awareness. The participants were also inquired upon inclination and interests of male members in gender sensitive issues. They were then asked about their ways of public dealing and their vision of their own political career.

Thematic Analysis

The responses in the interview can be categorized under different themes. The *private sphere*, wherein I tried to analyze the relationship of EWRs with their women relatives and neighbors, the decision making of EWRs in household matters, management of household chores by EWRs and officials, and support from in-laws.

Under the theme, *the attitude of men towards women and their empowerment*, the responses were inclined towards that men are verbally ready to resolve women issues however, the issue of budget constraint always create hindrance in resolving gender issues vis-à-vis village development, the ‘Conversations amongst different genders’ within the family and in the public sphere was raised by S11, and it was unanimously agreed upon by the officials that women sarpanchas require husbands’ permission to act.

The responses on their conduct in the *public sphere*, indicated that all the EWRs required male support in elections, except for S10 and S11. This indicates that, in majority of the cases, a woman to stand in elections, to fight for the seat, and to win the seat, requires social networking which is an advantage of men in our society. The participants through their responses indicated that had their not been the support their MRs, it would have been difficult for them to campaign and fight for their own elections. With the exception to S3, S10, S11, and W10, all the EWRs requires male support in public dealing. With the same exceptions, there is lack of awareness of official work. Any willingness to continue in political arena depends on family members for all, except S3 and S10.

Case Study

S10 got elected as sarpanch of the Narsinghpura-Dadiya, Sanganer constituency, in the first elections after passing of the Amendment act in 1992. She faced drastic change in her lifestyle after getting married while she just then completed her senior secondary in school. Soon after her marriage, she was asked to contest the 1994 panchayat elections and become proxy for her husband. She was self-motivated to serve as an independent sarpanch and eventually had to leave her marital family with her children. Her relations with her family members, after becoming sarpanch had been deteriorated. She had faced all her struggles independently, without any support from her maternal or marital family.

She understands the attitude of men and face them single-handedly. According to her, ‘sarpanch pati’ is present in 90% of the cases where they handle everything. For officials and men, village development is prior to women development.

She had contested for the panchayat samiti position. She has won on an unreserved seat of sarpanch. 60-70% of the votes has always been in her favor. She does self-campaigning during elections. She is

the vice-president of the state mahila morcha of the political party she is associated with. She is responsible for making women aware of their rights, and concatenate the party. The political party considers the group of women as an isolated category. But she forcefully takes their rights to get involved in the normal working of the party. She wishes to contest for panchayat samiti and MLA position.

Discussion

The effect of male presence in the private and public spheres of women

The contact details of the elected panchayat members are available in the government records. In case of the EWRs, the contact details present are that of an MR from their respective families. 'Male consent, support and encouragement', given by Manuela Ciotti (2009), is exploited by the MRs of the EWRs in order to keep the seat safe till next elections. For all the respondents, except S4, S10, S11, W3 (facilitated by S3), W6 (facilitated by O6), and W10 (facilitated by S6), the meeting for the interview was arranged by their respective MRs. In all these cases, MRs were hesitant and reluctant to arrange the meeting. They anticipated that I would take the interview on behalf of the government or a media house. Inevitably these MRs were also physically present during the interview to answer the questions, except in the cases of S1, S3, S9, W3, W8, W9, and W11.

The presence of the MR of S2 affected the most. Before reaching the interview site, I had to ask for the location from the village members present nearby. Everyone addressed the sarpanch not by the name of S2 but by the name of the husband, say S2a, like, "Do you want to go to house of sarpanch S2a?". After reaching, S2 called S2a to inform my arrival. S2, even though being an M.A. student looked towards her husband for responses. Not one response came from her. It became difficult for me ask questions from S2 directly. It felt like I was taking permission from her husband for each question I asked. S2a is an active MR, and made S2 stand for the elections only because it was the reserved seat. He even shared that he gets the documents signed from S2 whenever required. He even 'allowed' S2 to sign the response sheet.

On similar lines, the experience with S7 showed the patriarchal functioning even though the sarpanch is a woman. She did not utter a single word. Her husband answered for her. In addition to this, all men present during this interview were hesitant to give a separate room to conduct the interview. In fact, all men present there forced me take the responses from the husband himself, in the absence of S7, because she was busy working in fields, as she will respond the same as he would ask her to. However, the male key informants, who arranged the meeting, made sure that S7 is present during the interview.

S6 also gave her interview in the physical presence of her MR, her husband and other key male informants. All men present there insisted on taking the interview in presence of everyone. To reach a middle ground, the interview was taken under similar conditions as that of the S7. However, S7 was better in responding to her questions.

The MR of S5, her husband, had to be assured that the interview was for study purposes only and was present in the interview for majority of the time period. The responses were given by S5, however, for the responses to question like, whether she would stand for next elections, what is her age, or any panchayat related question, she looked towards her husband and answered in affirmation. When the response was recorded for the panchayat functioning, it was the MR of S5 who could respond to them. Before the interview got started her daughter returned from school. Hence, S5 could give the interview

only after taking care of her, even though the MR, father of the daughter, was present there, uninvolved in any work. While the interview was going on, a male relative wanted to take their leave. But S5 insisted on making tea for him. She became uncomfortable in not being able to arrange tea for him. At last after several requests, the male relative said that he could wait. Only then S5 could continue with the interview peacefully.

S8 gave her interview in the presence of a male member of her family. Her MR, the father-in-law waited outside with the key informants who had arranged the interview. After the interview, the MR of S8 checked the response sheet only after which S8 could sign it.

For S9, the meeting was arranged with her son, after long persuasion by one of the key informants. Her son, also had to be assured that the interview was conducted for research purposes only. The granddaughter of S9 was asked to facilitate the interview, or give answers on her behalf. Like in case of S8, the response sheet was checked by the son of S9.

In case of S3, she was a confident respondent. However, to get an initial thrust, the position formerly held by her husband, as the Director, was utilized by her to gain trust of the village members. Even her husband didn't care much about my presence.

The false interview of W1 showcases the perfect example of 'lip service' to women empowerment through the Amendment act of 1992. Here as well, the meeting was arranged by the MR, the father-in-law, of W1. After reaching the interview site, I had to convince him of the fact that I do not represent government. He kept on disparaging the panchayat office and the inefficiency of S2 (targeting S2a here). After long persuasion, he represented a lady as W1, and kept on answering questions along with her and sometimes on her behalf. It became difficult to ask questions related to the private sphere and personal experiences of W1 due to an intimidating environment. It was only at the end of the interview, I met the actual W1 when she was called out in the verandah to sign the response sheet.

W2 also gave her interview in presence of her husband, which made it onerous to know the responses of W2 on her personal experiences and political career. However, she was able to share some intricate facts like the reason why only she was chosen to stand for the elections over other women in the family. Her another response highlighted her inclination to serve the society. She shared that, she would be able to perform her duties of a ward member if she gets more support from in-laws, which she unexpectedly shared in absence of her husband.

W4 is the deputy sarpanch of her panchayat. However, in general public it is known that her husband is the deputy sarpanch. While he was giving her interview, she skipped the response to the questions that dealt with panchayat functioning. Her response that, village members do not share their grievances with her, shows that her representation as the deputy sarpanch has not translated to her participation in that capacity. When she was present amongst the male members, she kept veil on her face. Even here, the MR was shown the response sheet. W5 was also present in the same room. She was also hesitant in giving the interview, and her responses also showed that she is also a proxy member.

Son of W6 forced her to become ward member because he himself is interested in politics and wanted the seat to remain within the family till next elections. The capabilities of W6 in capacity of a ward member cannot be questioned on the basis of her resistance to fight for the next term. On her personal level, she is aware of her duties as ward member, and is fully aware of the problems that women and village members in general face. But, her conditioning from childhood and her compulsion to take care

of her 21 year old paralyzed son has somewhat restricted her to even think about serving the society. Her repeated response was, "I am only concerned about my family... I have seen many hardships in my life from childhood... I want to take care of my family...I don't care about the outer world... I do not understand all these politics." This comes majorly from her hard experiences. I would support this opinion with the fact that she has built a good social reputation in her ward. Everyone knows and respects her. She assertively talks about the obligation of the government to work on sewage and water problems in the ward. She does not shy away from criticizing the government on the inability to work on these basic requirements of the village. She is ready to help anyone need, but has refused to enter politics because it would consume a lot of time and efforts which are instead required in her family.

W7 was also accompanied by her husband who is also her representative. Her responses, even age, first got verified from her MR. In fact, the affirmation to contest for next elections were given by her MR directly. In case of W8, even though the physical presence of her MR, the husband, was absent, her responses revealed that it was her MR who performed the duties of a ward member. Similarly, W9 is also represented by her husband in the panchayat.

Apart from the interviews, the committees in panchayats are also gendered. Women are made members of the committees like health and education only. Elected MRs are held with the responsibilities of administration, revenue, social justice, and agriculture. Even though women form majority of the agricultural laborers and MGNREGA workers (as shared by O4 and O5) still they are restricted from becoming members of the latter committees.

The caste and gender intersectionality affecting the private spheres and the panchayat functioning

Apart from the interviews, the committees in panchayats are also gendered. Women are made members of the committees like health and education only. Elected MRs are held with the responsibilities of administration, revenue, social justice, and agriculture. Even though women form majority of the agricultural laborers and MGNREGA workers (as shared by O4 and O5) still they are restricted from becoming members of the latter committees. Belonging to an SC category in Rajasthan, S1 follows the purdah system in and outside her home. She is expected to cover her face in the presence of men. She shared that in gram sabha, she requires assistance of her husband to convey the meetings. S7 put veil during the interview. Being a woman belonging to the Gurjar (SBC) caste, she is expected to cover her face in presence of males. She did not make an eye contact even for once with the other men present during the interview, except for her husband. For all the sarpanchas, except S10 and S11, irrespective of their caste, they were expected to at least cover their head at all times. The caste to which S10 belongs also expects the same, however, she has broken all the shackles of caste and gender discrimination and carry out herself according to her wish. Unlike any other sarpanch, except S11, she even owns a car and drives it. W1 was not even allowed to come out in the verandah, and when she came out she put on her veil due to the presence her father-in-law. The same was not practiced by the daughters of that household. Point to be noted here is, she belongs to General caste, which apparently is progressive towards women's rights. Similarly, for ward members belonging to General (W6, W8, W9, W11), OBC (W2, W3), SC (W5, and W7) and ST (W4) categories, are all expected to draw veil in presence of men. The practice of drawing veil may seem an important gesture to show respect towards elders. But this has restricted women in their daily functioning. They even have to draw permission from their husbands and other male family members on whom to talk to and where to go. Except S3, S10, S11, W10 and W11, all the EWRs require the assistance of their respective MRs to function in the panchayat.

The interrelationship between the EWRs and the officials

During her interview, S3 shared that she encourages women ward members to utilize their position to bring change in their own lives and the society. This was visible when W3 was hesitant to give interview, and the former encouraged her to go ahead without any hesitation. In case of S4, the officials O4 and O5 expected better from her. According to them, S4 is doing 'lip service' and she could have taken better steps to support and help the woman facing the residence issues. I would avoid relying on the word of mouth and behind the door conversations, however, they shared positive experiences with former woman sarpanch, who took strong steps for both the village development and women empowerment. According to officials O1 and O2, 90 % of the EWRs depend on their respective MRs even for the signatures. For O6, it becomes irritating after a point of time when he has remind the higher officials for her remuneration, as her post is a contract based one.

Way forward

This study was undertaken to investigate the effects on the private and public spheres of the EWRs and the presence of caste and gender intersectionalities in the panchayat offices. The primary concern here is that even after approximately 30 decades of the passage of the Amendment act, EWRs face the issues of gender discrimination. They are still considered less competent than men. The dominating male presence affects the private and public domains of women's lives and is not restricted to one relation. Any male from a EWR family can represent her in the public sphere. He can be a husband, son, or father-in-law. A woman's will to represent herself is visible only in two cases of the sample population. The presence of caste practices is very subtle and ingrained in our society, to the extent that I, as a researcher, could not help but understand specific actions as 'normal' activities of a woman's life. Another highlight of this study has been the inter-relationship between different hierarchical positions in the panchayat offices held by women, elected (sarpanch and ward member), and appointed (official). The characteristic of this relation seems supportive of each other with the help of a few cases discussed above; however, the concrete division of posts, remunerations, and accountability create an inevitable hierarchy in the functioning of the panchayats.

The United Nations (UN) Women guides us on improving political participation of women by consistent periodic monitoring the progress of women representation, going beyond numbers and instead focusing on decision making skills and the improved status. The organization supports the idea of making both man and woman of a family responsible to balance personal and professional life. This can be manifested with help of innovative training modules for the elected representatives. The participation of women in civil societies like SHGs can also act as a catalyzer in improving political representation of women. UN Women also focuses on legislative and constitutional reformative steps to improve the overall political participation for women, in capacities of a voter, civil society member, candidate, or an elected representative.

In addition, to address the existing limitations in the functioning of the PRI, government needs to focus more on training of EWRs. EWRs must be trained not only to implement the government schemes and become good managers of the PRI, but to become independent decision makers. I intend to convey that, these trainings will help in addressing the issues in the present time along with other gender sensitization and upliftment programs run by the government. The training programs must address the political willingness of EWRs. Political willingness is one of the major factors leading to political empowerment. The study has also highlighted that higher education does not lead to increased political ambition and

willingness. If a woman is motivated even to exercise her duties independently, that will also lead to an improvement in journey towards true empowerment. As suggested by two sarpanchas under the sample population, the officials must be made accountable for independent decision making of EWRs, which can be started with a small step like an affidavit signed by the EWR to undertake the responsibility of taking independent decisions. Also, an exchange program of Panchayati Raj Institutions of different states can help gain experiences from different cultures and backgrounds, as suggested by an expert in the 2nd International Conference on Women, 2023.

References

- Brooks, A., 2007, "An Invitation to Feminist research." *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*. Ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber. *Sage Publication, New Delhi*. 53-83.
- Buch, N., 2009, Reservation for Women in Panchayats: A Sop in Disguise? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44(40), 8–10.
- Ciotti, M., 2009, The Conditions of Politics: Low-Caste Women's Political Agency in Contemporary North Indian Society. *Feminist Review*, 91(1), 113- 134.
- Devika, J. & Thampi, B.V, 2012, *New Lamps for Old: Gender Paradoxes of Political Decentralisation in Kerala. Zubaan*. ISBN: 978 93 81017 18 0
- Disch, L. & Hawkesworth, M. EDs., 2016, *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory, Oxford University Press*. ISBN 978-0-19-932858-1.
- Duflo, E-sther & Topalova, P-etia, 2003, Unappreciated Service: Performance, Perceptions, and Women Leaders in India. *The Field Experiments Website, Natural Field Experiments*.
- Election Commission of India. <https://eci.gov.in/statistical-report/statistical-reports/> Date of access: 12/09/2022
- Geetha, V., 2007, *Patriarchy. Stree Publications*. ISBN 81-85604-46-0.
- https://adrindia.org/sites/default/files/Women_representation_among_all_MPs_and_MLAs_English.pdf Date of access: 14/02/2023
- <https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/caste-system-and-panchayati-raj/> Date of access: 02/10/2022
- https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chaksu_Rajasthan_Assembly_Map.svg
- https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sanganer_Rajasthan_Assembly_Map.svg
- <https://www.drishtiiias.com/important-institutions/drishti-specials-important-institutions-national-institutions/panchayati-raj-institution-pri> Date of access: 15/10/2022
- <https://www.jatinverma.org/12th-national-panchayati-raj-day>
- <https://www.toppr.com/ask/question/briefly-explain-the-composition-of-the-zila-parishad/> Date of access: 02/10/2022
- <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ngo/outreachmaterials/empowerment-booklet.pdf>
- <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation#:~:text=UN%20Women%20advocates%20for%20legislative,officials%20and%20civil%20service%20members.-> Date of Access: 24/09/2023
- <https://www-epw-in.tiss.remotlog.com/journal/2021/28/editorials/re-emergence-gender-political-category.html>. Published in *Economic and Political Weekly*. 2021. LVI (28).
- <https://www-indiastat-com.tiss.remotlog.com/data/administrative-units/panchayats-and-elected-representatives> Date of access: 25/09/2022

Kumari, A. R. & Singh, N., 2015, Evaluating the Role Performance of Elected Women Members in Panchayati Raj Institution. *Indian Res. J. Ext. Edu.*, 15 (3).

Observer Research Foundation. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/link-between-education-and-participation-of-women-in-politics/> Date of access: 15/09/2022

Online Resources

Osmond, M.W. and Thorne, B., 1993, Feminist Theories: The Social Construction of Gender in Families and Society. In: Boss, P.G., Doherty, W.J., LaRossa, R., Schumm, W.R. and Steinmetz, S.K., Eds., Sourcebook of Family Theories and Methods: A Contextual Approach. *Plenum, New York*, 591-625. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-85764-0_23

Raju, S., 2013, The Material and the Symbolic: Intersectionalities of Home-Based Work in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(1), 60–68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23391138>.

Singh, S. S., 2022, The New Contours of Identity Politics: Saffron Mobilization of Dalit and Backward Caste in Uttar Pradesh. *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, 0(0).

The informed consent forms have been structured on the Informed Consent Form Template for Qualitative Studies published by Research Ethics Review Committee (WHO ERC), World Health Organization.

Women for Politics. <https://www.womenforpolitics.com/our-work/categories/blog> Date of access: 12/10/2022

World Bank. PR in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh <https://web.worldbank.org/archive/website01061/WEB/IMAGES/INCLUSIO.PDF> Date of access: 11/09/2022

Appendix

Table 1 Basic demographic details of Sarpanchas

Sarpanchas	Panchayat Name	Age	Marital Status	Educational Qualification	Caste	Office Tenure (in years)
S1	Sri Ram Ki Nangal	32	Married	VIII	SC	3
S2	Bari ka Bas	30	Married	M.A. Final	ST	3
S3	Beelwa Kalan	46	Married	B.A.	SC	3
S4	Thikariya	31	Married	Triple M.A.	OBC	3
S5	Neota	28	Married	M.A.	General	3
S6	Garoodwasi	32	Married	VIII	SC	2
S7	Mandaliyan Meda	23	Married	First year	SBC	2
S8	Tigariya	23	Married	VIII	SC	2.5
S9	Bhapura	67	Married	Illiterate	MBC	3
S10	Narsinghpura-Dadiya	49	Married	XII	OBC	27
S11 (former)	Soda	N.A.	N.A.	Hyderabad and USA	N.A.	10

Table 2 Basic demographic details of Ward Members

Ward Members	Panchayat Name	Age	Marital Status	Educational Qualification	Caste	Office Tenure (in years)
W1	Murlipura-Mishra ka Barh	30	Married	VIII	General	3
W2	Bari ka Bas	26	Married	X	OBC	3
W3	Beelwa Kalan	40	Married	Illiterate	OBC	3
W4 (deputy sarpanch)	Sri Ram ki Nangal	24	Married	V	ST	3
W5	Sri Ram ki Nangal	30	Married	VIII	SC	3
W6	Thikariya	49	Married	V	General	3
W7	Sri Ram ki Nangal	25	Married	VIII	SC	3
W8	Sri Ram ki Nangal	N.A.	Married	X	General	3
W9	Bhapura	47	Married	VII	General	3
W10 (former deputy sarpanch)	Garudwasi	32	Married	VIII	SC	5
W11	Tigariya	35	Married	V	General	3

Table 3 Basic demographic details of Officials

Officials	Panchayat Name	Age	Marital Status	Educational Qualification	Caste	Office Tenure (in years)	Designation
O1	Bari ka Bas	34	Married	M.A.	ST	12	Village Development Officer
O2	Bari ka Bas	39	Widow	B.A.	General	10	Lower Division Clerk
O3	Sri Ram ki Nangal	38	Married	M.A.	OBC	5	Village Panchayat Sahayak
O4	Thikariya	30	Married	B.A.	SC	10	Lower Division Clerk
O5	Thikariya	31	Married	M.A.	OBC	2	Lower Division Clerk
O6	Theekriyan	39	Married	M.A. Final	OBC	5	Village Panchayat Sahayak
O7	Sri Ram ki Nangal	40	Married	M.A.	ST	N.A.	Village Development Officer
O8	Narsinghpura-Dadiya	27	Married	M.A.	General	5	Village accountant
O9	Narsinghpura-Dadiya	34	Married	M.Tech.	General	5	Village Accountant

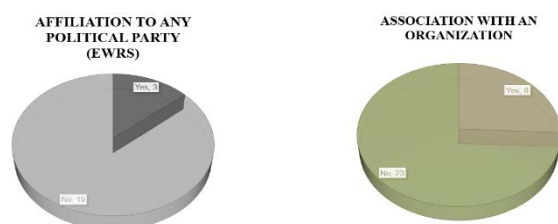


Figure 1 Association of the participants at individual level