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## Economic empowerment of tribal women in Panchayatiraj: a study of Keonjhar district of Odisha

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**Abstract:**

*Although most women in India work and contribute to the economy in one form or another, much of their work is not documented or accounted for in official statistics. Tribal Women plow fields and harvest crops while working on farms, women weave and make handicrafts while working in household industries, women sell food and gather wood while working in the informal sector. Additionally, women are traditionally responsible for the daily household chores. Since Indian culture hinders women's access to jobs in stores, factories and the public sector, the informal sector is particularly important for women. There are estimates that over 90 per cent of working women are involved in the informal sector. The informal sector includes jobs such as domestic servant, small trader, artisan, or field labourer on a family farm.*

**KEY WORDS:** 1 Tribal women, 2 Economic empowerment, 3 Panchayatiraj, 4 Governance,

## I. Introduction

The constitutionally mandated panchayats were visualized as institutions of self-governance. States would devolve power to the PRIs and give them resources and responsibilities so that they emerge as institutions of self-governance instead of remaining as agencies for developmental administration only. As the process of devolution is slow, it requires pressure from women's groups to force state governments to act fast and issue notifications to make it possible and practically brought to the field. Empowerment of women in political terms is a must to ensure this process.

The empowerment of powerless sections of society. Women Scheduled Caste/ Scheduled Tribes does not happen by merely giving them representation in the PRIs. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment promises that through a representative democracy, that is, by giving representation to socially and economically disadvantaged sections, PRIs will gradually be transformed from merely representative to participatory bodies. This, in fact, was implied in the provision of 1/3 representation to women. It envisages a shift from meeting the developmental needs of the people to enabling them to undertake developmental planning and bring about a change in developmental perspectives. Democratic decentralization presupposes that people not only have control over the resources but also have a perspective as to how to plan and allocate the resources at the local level.

The available literature on the economic empowerment of Tribal women in Panchayatiraj system as seen by various academic both positive and negative intellect as (1993) finds constitutional procedures that realized by the women to have equality in social, economic and justice across the field. Jaypal et.al (1997) found in the study of "Women Panchayat Presidents" that they seen women participated in the panchayat through they did not fulfill the social, economic and political conditions. Palanithurai, G.(1998) describes that women Panchayat leaders are faced lots of problems when they are from lower educational and economic background. It was found that the women leaders were intended looking at their economy, social and educational background to participate and perform role in the village governing units. Athreya et.al(1998) in their study "Women Participation in Panchayati Raj: A Case Study from Tamil Nadu" measured the social background, economic conditions and political back up of women who took post in the panchayatiraj institution. Buch, Nirmala (2000) expressed that, all women members were received support from their male member. The support the women leaders received were tentative and temporary. Tiwari (2012) observed that lack of education and economic backwardness the elected women did realize the position because it was the village head or some influential male member dominate the meeting and implementation procedures.

### The following are objectives of the study:

- To examine the nature and extent of Tribal women's participation in Panchayati Raj institution in the light of their social background factors. class, Caste, age, education, marital status.
- To study their economic status of Tribal women in Panchayatiraj system in Keonjhar district.
- To articulate, give expression to and find solutions to the problems and conflicts which Tribal women members might be facing in their work.

## II. Methodology

**Area:** The study has been conducted Keonjhar district of Odisha. It has been covered six blocks and 24 Gram panchayat of the district.

**Data collection:** Both Qualitative and Quantitative data has been collected from Gram panchayat, Block samiti and Zilla parishad.

**Tools for Data Collection:** The primary data has been collected with the help of interview schedule to the prepared for various panchayat raj institutions. Besides one interview scheduled has been also be prepared for the collection of data from the elected women members of various PRIs. For the collection of Secondary data official records, newspaper and other books on local self-institution published by government of Odisha and other distinguished authors has been consulted.

### III. Universe and sample

Universe of the study constitutes six blocks, 24 Gram Panchayats and 240 sample elected tribal women from Keonjhar district, Odisha. For a better representation of the universe, a multi-stage stratified sampling was adopted purposively. The procedure was as follows:

In the first stage, Keonjhar district has selected looking at the point of semi scheduled area. The bases are education, livelihoods, infrastructure, women literacy, and women participation in politics. In the second stage, six blocks has been selected with purposefully and concentration to high tribal population (As per 2011 Census) such as Banspal block, Ghatgaon block, Harichandanpur block, Joda block, Patna block and Saharpada block from Keonjhar district. In the third stage, four GPs from each block have been selected on the basis of development indicators such as education, infrastructure, women literacy, and women participation in politics. In the fourth stage, forty women PRI members from each block have been selected to fulfill the objectives of the study.

### IV. Study area of the project

In Odisha, panchayat elections were held in January 1997 and they will in all likelihood continue in office till 2002. So the project district in Odisha had the opportunity to study women who were freshly elected.

- (a) Keeping the above parameters in mind, the ISS planned a programme of action in the six district for the three years, i.e. 1998, 1999,2000. The work related to monitoring the performance of elected women representatives in Panchayats was taken up in the initial programme. Questionnaires on womem's participation in PRIs were prepared and distributed among the investigators. After compilation of data a through analysis was made and results were used for further intervention.
- (b) A detailed paper on the social background of the women panchayat members who are within the project wes prepared and published as a source material for using during the training programme. These directories were found to be quite valuable and the women members regarded them as valuable possessions.
- (c) For the members of panchayats, a one-day training programme was organized. About 30 elected members, both men and women, from two panchayats underwent training simultaneously. This was done with a view that men also will be sensitized through their participation so that they can get a clear understanding of the role of women in Panchayats and in society.

The content and methods of the training undertaken by the ISS can be given as follows:

- (1) Interactive discussions instead of structural lecturers
- (2) Role-plays
- (3) Simple learning materials in Hindi and Oriya were prepared and distributed and used extensively with required photographs and illustrations.
- (4) Case studies of success and failures of women in panchayats were explained. There was reporting about the initiative taken by various members of panchayats who received training during the first stage of the project.
- (5) Vedeo film shows were a strong and integral part of the training programme. Vedeo film shows on women's empowerment and there after discussions were significant impact on the minds of the people, especially those who are illiterate world benefited maximum with this exercise. The ISS organized regular video shows to impress upon the Panchayat members about their role and the requirements of empowerment.
- (d) The directory of the women members under study was prepared and distributed. This step provided information to the people in the Panchayats and other parts of the State about the elected members. It has enhanced women's status and boosted their self-esteem in the society.
- (e) Appropriate banners carrying messages such as Women's Political Empowerment is through Panchayats. Panchayats were displayed in the village streets,market places and other common public areas. Appropriate wall writings in the selected village, blocks with an objective of creating the much needed atmosphere and awareness about panchayats and women's participation in it.

(f) Two-day conferences at the inter-village panchayat, inter block panchayat and district and state levels were organized. The conferences focused on issues such as the importance of grassroots level democracy, role of local government and development of society. Women’s participation in decision-making and many other relevant topics. Such programmes held in the panchayat boosted the morale of panchayat members, especially women, which otherwise got sidelined by vested interests.

(g) Case studies and profile of women members were prepared. This includes their struggle for success, difficulties in achieving their aspirations and their suggestions for rectification of the system.

The Institute was responsive to situations that arose from time to time. This approach facilitated maximization of benefits to the target group as envisaged in the programme. The Institute is making an effort to make these districts into model districts from the point of functioning of the panchayats. The grant given by Sida was utilized in the broad framework of investing in people for creating much-needed social as well as institutions in order to build a society where women and men are equal partners.

**V. Sampling of the blocks and elected tribal women in keonjhar district**

The total sample of the study is 240 elected tribal women of the 6 blocks of Keonjhar District, of which 12 are Samiti Members, 6 are Zilla Parishad and 222 are Ward Members. In order to trace out the socio-economic profile of the sampled size that is the elected to tribal women in Panchayati Raj System field study was conducted in the 6 blocks. In a political system, social structure and economic conditions plays vital role to contest elections in micro level governance as well as in the macro governance system. The variables are collected, respondents economic position, education status, age structure, marital status, number of children, livelihoods activities, annual income in all sources have calculated in tabular form to enable the researcher to viable the objectives of the study.

Table-1.1: **Distribution of elected Tribal women**

Sl.No	Blocks	Sarapanch	WM	SM	ZP	Total
1	Banspal	3 (7.50)	34 (85.00)	2 (5.00)	1 (2.50)	40 (100.00)
2	Ghatagaon	1 (2.50)	36 (90.00)	2 (5.00)	1 (2.50)	40 (100.00)
3	HariChandanpur	1 (2.50)	37 (92.50)	1 (2.50)	1 (2.50)	40 (100.00)
4	Joda	1 (2.50)	36 (90.00)	2 (5.00)	1 (2.50)	40 (100.00)
5	Patna	1 (2.50)	37 (92.50)	1 (2.50)	1 (2.50)	40 (100.00)
6	Saharpada	1 (2.50)	36 (90.00)	2 (5.00)	1 (2.50)	40 (100.00)
<b>Total</b>		<b>5 (2.08)</b>	<b>216 (90.00)</b>	<b>10 (4.17)</b>	<b>6 (2.50)</b>	<b>240 (100.00)</b>

Source: Field Survey, Figures in parentheses represent percentage to the respective total

**Table number 1.1** Reveals sampling Blocks of Keonjhar District, Odisha. This table also deals with the Sarapanch, Ward Members, Samiti Members and Zilla Praishad. Banspal is the largest Block and of which 3 tribal women Sarapanch, 34 Ward Members, 2 Samiti Members and one Zilla Parishad being selected. The rest Blocks are have one each Sarapanch.

**VI. Age of the respondents**

Age is an important social variable; for human being it’s connected with biology. Therefore the universe of study age gives an added advantage as the aged are normally consider as factor of analysis in the research. With age a person normally acquires more resources which may be helpful to gain advantage in different

respects. Moreover, it is also necessary to know people of which age group dominate the political field at the grassroots level as well in the national.

**Table -1.2: Age of the respondents**

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20-25	38	15.83
26-30	42	17.50
31-35	40	16.67
36-40	34	14.16
41-45	34	14.16
46-50	31	12.92
50 above	21	8.75
Total	240	100

Source: Field Survey

**Table 1.2** Depicts the age of the respondents that out of the 240 elected representatives 15.83 (38) percent respondents were age group of 20-25 years of old, 17.50 (42) percent were age group of 26-30 years of old, 16.67 (40) percent respondents were age group of 31-35 years old, those who are 20-35 years of old age which indicates entry of young generation in panchayatiraj system. 14.16 (34) percent respondents were age group of 36-40 years old, 14.16 (31) percent respondents were age group of 41-45 years old, and 12.92 (31) percent respondents were age group of 46-50 years old. Those who are 45 years of age and above but have crossed 50 years of age which indicates entry of the middle young age generation in panchayatiraj system. There were also 8.75 (21) percent each from age group of 50 above years old which indicates old age generation in panchayatiraj system.

#### **VII. Sub-Tribes of the Respondents**

As it based tribal women study and role of tribal women in panchayatiraj system, and sub-tribe of the people play significant role in Indian political system. Different sub-tribes tribal women's are participated in the political field .The women from their sub-tribes are such as Munda, Sounti, Santal, Bathudi and Bhuyan.

**Table -1.3: Sub-Tribes of the Respondents**

Sub-Tribes	Frequency	Percentage
Munda	65	27.08
Sounti	32	13.33
Santal	62	25.84
Bathudi	8	3.33
Bhuyan	20	8.33
Others	53	22.09
Total	240	100

Above table 1.3 depicts the sub tribe of the respondents. Out of the 240 respondents 27.08 (65) percent are from Munda tribe, 25.84 (62) percent are from Santal tribe, 13.33 (32) percent are from Sounti tribe, 8.33 (20) percent are from Bhuyan tribe and 3.33(8) percent are from Bathudi tribe. Munda are the dominant tribe in this district and also, they are quite well aware about the local politics in the district.

#### **VIII. Marital Status of the Elected Tribal Women**

Marital status does play an important role in political participation. It is suggested that marriage provides certain stability in life which helps in greater political involvement. Association with the husband or link with his name also sometimes influences the political fortune of a woman. Often it is seen that wife automatically gains the political capital of her husband. Sometimes after the death of her husband she

succeeds her husband in the political field. Marriage is the sacrament of any society and tribal are not exceptional. In the tribal society, they get married little early. Due to intervention of several government schemes and awareness camps now they are getting married on right time.

Following **table 1.4** reveals the marital status of elected tribal women that out of the total 240 respondents 87.08 percent (209) are married and 12.92 percent (31) are unmarried. Block wise data indicates that highest 95 percent (38) married noticed in Saharpada block and highest 17.50 percent (7) unmarried noticed in Ghatagaon block. Married elected tribal women have played multiple roles that are they have to look after their home works and also as representative for the people they have to look after the wards, panchayat works. It indicates that unmarried women can perform better than married in panchayatiraj system (**Table 1.4**).

Table- 1.4: **Distribution of elected Tribal women with their marital status**

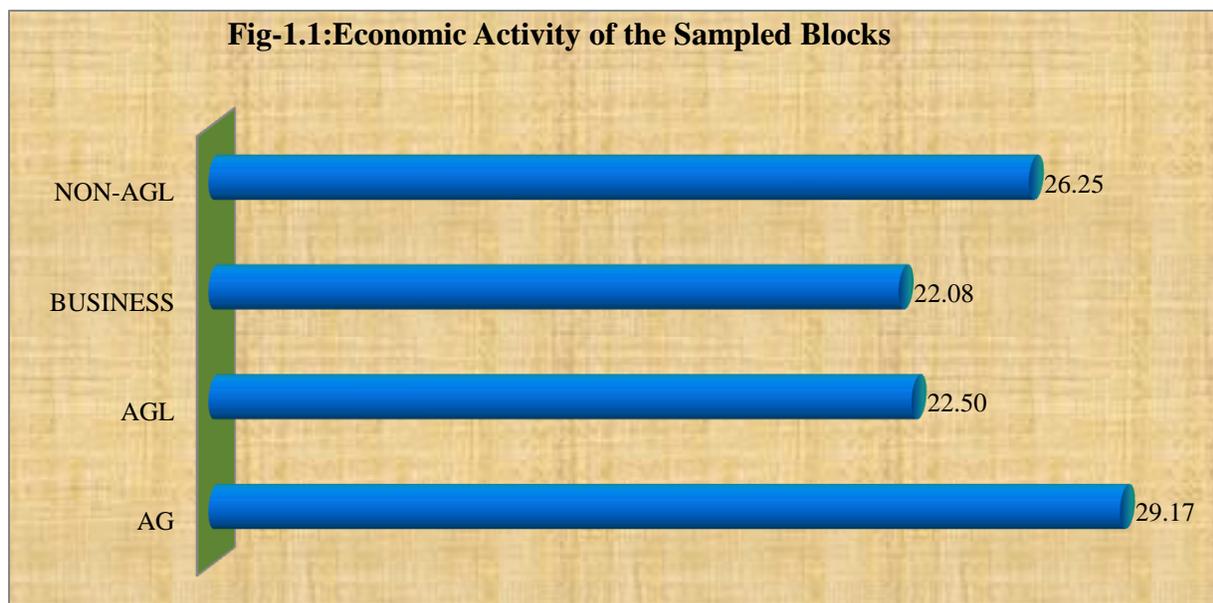
Sl.No	Blocks	Married	Unmarried	Total
1	Banspal	34 (85.00)	6 (15.00)	40 (100.00)
2	Ghatagaon	33 (82.50)	7 (17.50)	40 (100.00)
3	Hari Chandanpur	34 (85.00)	6 (15.00)	40 (100.00)
4	Joda	34 (85.00)	6 (15.00)	40 (100.00)
5	Patna	36 (90.00)	4 (10.00)	40 (100.00)
6	Saharpada	38 (95.00)	2 (5.00)	40 (100.00)
<b>Total</b>		<b>209</b> <b>(87.08)</b>	<b>31</b> <b>(12.92)</b>	<b>240</b> <b>(100.00)</b>

Source: Field Survey, N.B.: Figures in parentheses represent percentage to the respective totals

#### **IX. Economic Activity of the Sampled Blocks**

Keonjhar being a landlocked tribal dominated district. Therefore most of the tribal peoples depend on agriculture, daily wage labour, few of them are non-agricultural labourers and scanty numbers of people engage in petty business.

Figure 1.1 reveals the economic activity of the elected tribal women. Out of the total 240 respondents, 29.17 (70) percent are depends on agriculture, 22.50 (54) percent are wage earners through agriculture labour, 22.08 (53) percent respondents are engaged in petty business and rest 26.25 (63) percent depends on non-agricultural activities.



**Table 1.5** depicts block-wise economic activity of the elected tribal women. As seen, people of Banspal block engaged in agricultural activity. Of the 40 respondents in Banspal block, 30 (12) percent depends directly on agriculture and 30 (12) percent depends on non-agricultural activity. There are 20 (8) percent each depends business and labourers. In other blocks namely Ghatagaon, Harichandanpur, Saharpada and Patna 30 (12) percent each engaged in agriculture activity and in Joda block, 25 (10) percent depends on agriculture. Agricultural labourers are found in all blocks. In Joda block highest number of people are engaged in petty business that 27.50 (11) percent and 22.50 (9) percent each in Ghatagaon and Harichandanpur and 20 (8) percent each in Banspal, Saharpada and Patna blocks. There are people who are also earning their livelihoods by non-agricultural activities.

**Table-1.5: Economic Activity of Sampled Blocks**

Sl.No	Blocks	AG	AGL	Business	Non-AGL	Total
1	Banspal	12 (30.00)	8 (20.00)	8 (20.00)	12 (30.00)	40 (100.00)
2	Ghatagaon	12 (30.00)	9 (22.50)	9 (22.50)	10 (25.00)	40 (100.00)
3	Hari Chandanpur	12 (30.00)	9 (22.50)	9 (22.50)	10 (25.00)	40 (100.00)
4	Joda	10 (25.00)	9 (22.50)	11 (27.50)	10 (25.00)	40 (100.00)
5	Patna	12 (30.00)	9 (22.50)	8 (20.00)	11 (27.50)	40 (100.00)
6	Saharpada	12 (30.00)	10 (25.00)	8 (20.00)	10 (25.00)	40 (100.00)
<b>Total</b>		<b>70 (29.17)</b>	<b>54 (22.50)</b>	<b>53 (22.08)</b>	<b>63 (26.25)</b>	<b>240 (100.00)</b>

Source: Field Survey, N.B.: Figures in parentheses represent percentage to the respective totals

### X. Livelihood sources of Elected Tribal women

The women of Keonjhar district is also part of economic activity in their home. It is seen they are engage in agriculture, non-agriculture also depends on daily labours. They are also collect eatable and useable roots, fruits,leaves etc from the forest.

The following **Table-1.6** Explains about the livelihood sources of the elected tribal women. On the account of PRI members, 58.33 (7) percent Samiti members have petty business activities and 41.67 (5) percent have agricultural activities. Among ward members, highest 28.38 (63) percent have non-agricultural activities, followed by 27.48 (61) percent have agricultural activities, 24.32 (54) percent have agricultural labour activities and 19.82 (44) percent have business activities. In case of Zilla Parishad members, 66.67 (4) percent elected tribal women have agricultural activities and 33.33 (2) percent elected tribal women have business activities.

Table-1.6: Livelihood sources of Elected Tribal women

Sl.No	EWS	AG	AGL	Petty Business	Non-AGL	Total
1	SM	5 (41.67)	0 (0.00)	7 (58.33)	0 (0.00)	12 (100.00)
2	WM	61 (27.48)	54 (24.32)	44 (19.82)	63 (28.38)	222 (100.00)
3	ZP	4 (66.67)	0 (0.00)	2 (33.33)	0 (0.00)	6 (100.00)
<b>Total</b>		<b>70 (29.17)</b>	<b>54 (22.50)</b>	<b>53 (22.08)</b>	<b>63 (26.25)</b>	<b>240 (100.00)</b>

Source: Field Survey, N.B.: Figures in parentheses represent percentage to the respective total

### XI. Average Annual Income of Elected Tribal Women

It is indicates average annual household income of the elected tribal women. The annual income is calculated with all sources of income. The annual income includes both agriculture and non-agriculture activities.

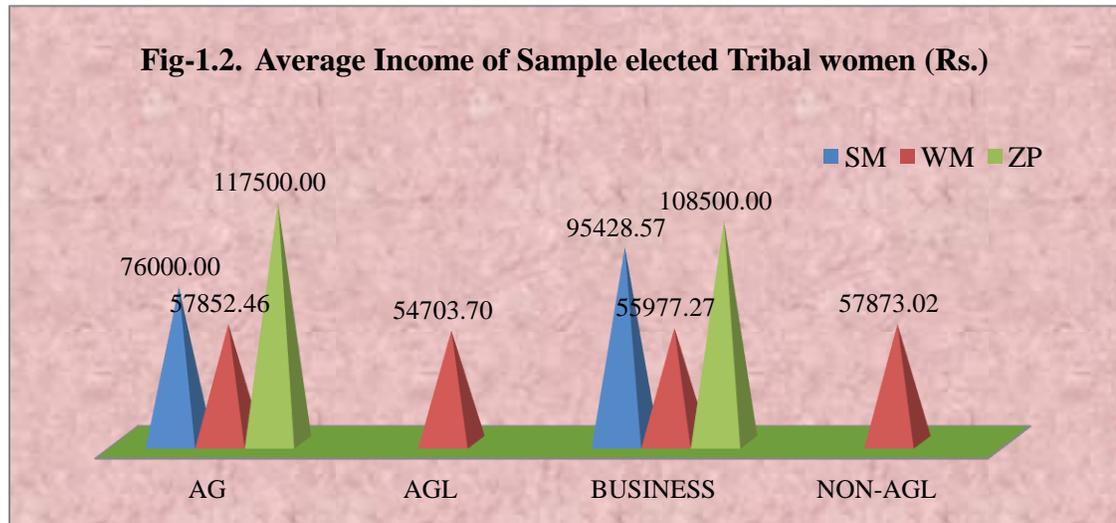
Out of the total sample, highest per household income Rest.63, 170/- generated from business activities, followed by Rest. 62,557/- generated from agricultural activities, Rest. 57,873/- generated from non-agricultural activities and Rest.54,704/- generated from agricultural labour activities.

Table 1.7: Average Income of Sample elected Tribal women (Rest.)

EWS	AG	AGL	BUSINESS	NON-AGL	Total
SM	76000.00	0.00	95428.57	0.00	87333.33
WM	57852.46	54703.70	55977.27	57873.02	56720.72
ZP	117500.00	0.00	108500.00	0.00	114500.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>62557.14</b>	<b>54703.70</b>	<b>63169.81</b>	<b>57873.02</b>	<b>59695.83</b>

Source: Field Survey, N.B: Figures in parentheses represent percentage to the respective total

In the context of sample blocks, per household average income of elected tribal women indicates that highest per household average income of tribal women representative is Rest. 60,575/- in Patna block, Followed by Rest.60, 325/- in Banspal block, Rest. 59,700/- in Ghatagaon block, Rest. 59,275/- in Harichandanpur and Saharpada block and Rest. 59,025/- in Joda block. Source-wise data reveals that highest Rest. 64,750/- per household average income from agricultural activities in Harichandanpur block, Rest. 58,000/- per household average income from agricultural labour activities in Patna block, Rest. 68,000/- per house hold average income from business activities in Saharpada block and Rest. 61,400/- per household average income from non-agricultural labour activities in Harichandanpur block.



Above figure 1.2 indicates elected members household annual income. In the context of PRI members, the average per household income of Samiti members is Rest. 87333/- highest income of Samiti members (Rs.95, 428.57) generated from business activities and rest Rs.76000/- per household income generated from agricultural activities. Among the ward members, Highest per household income Rs.57, 873/-generated from non-agricultural activities, followed by Rs.57852/- per household income generated from agriculture, Rest. 55977/- per household income generated from business activities and Rs.54704/- per household income generated from agricultural labour activities. Among the ZP members, the data indicates that per household average income is Rest. 1, 14,500/-. Out of them 66.67 percent PRI members are generated Rs.1, 17,500/- from agriculture and 33.33 percent PRI members are generated Rs.1, 08,500/- from business activities (Table 1.7 and Fig-1.2). It indicates that the sound income of PRI members can impels them to more participate in panchayatiraj system.

**XII. Conclusions**

One of the major constraints for women especially those coming from poor families is their economic dependency. They are not economically independent and sufficient funds must be arranged for them by Panchayati Raj Institutions to ensure their participation in the Panchayati raj activities. During the study it is observed that the criteria of funds distributions at the grassroots are not a requirement but it is based on political affiliation. It was observed that women are not economically independent most of the women ask for their husband for bus fare to attend the meetings of Gram Sabha.

Lack of proper devolution of funds has been revealed as one of the major hurdles in the participation of women. This has discouraged the elected women representative from taking interest in the democratic decentralization. It is observed that the financial condition of Panchayati Raj can improved by the efforts of State Finance Commission and grant-in-aid should be given in proper way. It is also observed that the financial position can help the female to take interest in politics.

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