

Innovations

Political Empowerment of Women at Grassroot level: An Empirical Study of Women Sarpanchin Dehradun, Uttarakhand

¹ Dr. Sangeeta Vijay & ² Aradhana Sharma

Head & Associate Professor, ² Research Scholar

^{1,2} Department of Political Science and Public Administration Banasthali Vidyapith,
Rajasthan, India

Abstract: *The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments of 1992 brought a revolution in India's political scenario by burning seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and urban local bodies. This study turns into a dynamic role of women in political processes at both national and local levels. While mandate is an important step for 33% reservation (and 50% in some states), challenges such as political tokenism, socio-economic obstacles and deep roots such as patriarchal norms still disrupt women's meaningful participation in governance. However, grassroots women are moving fast, taking leading initiatives in health, education and community development. These amendments have not only elevated women in the roles of decision making, but also underlined the important need for women's empowerment. In this research paper we have focused on the significant contribution of the sarpanch of women in Dehradun in Uttarakhand, as they navigate the challenges and conquer their communities. By sharing our inspirational stories, we aim to demonstrate the transformational power of women leaders in promoting social change and motivating future generations. Findings have drawn by observing in to the primary data as well as the secondary sources of data.*

Keywords: *Empowerment, Women Empowerment, Political Empowerment, Panchayati Raj*

Introduction

Empowerment seeks to amplify the voices of the marginalized, ensuring that the underprivileged are included in decision-making processes that affect their lives. It is a transformative journey that enables individuals and communities to gain control over their circumstances, fostering independence, authority, and the freedom to make choices. Despite a rich legacy of influential female leaders, such as Indira Gandhi, the first female Prime Minister, and a growing number of women in positions of power, women continue to be significantly underrepresented in formal political spaces at both national and state levels. This disparity highlights the intricate interplay of institutional, sociocultural, and economic factors that shape women's participation in political processes. In the context of women empowerment, it is about creating a political and social environment where women can thrive without the fear of discrimination, harassment, or exploitation. Historically, women have faced systemic barriers that have stifled their potential, often viewed through a lens of inferiority in patriarchal societies. This issue transcends borders, affecting women in both developed and developing nations, where they frequently encounter social and political inequalities.

In India, where women constitute over half of the population, the gender imbalance remains a pressing concern, with women often relegated to subordinate roles in both social prestige and political status. Addressing these disparities is not just a matter of equity; it is essential for the holistic development of society. Therefore, the empowerment of women has emerged as a critical issue, necessitating concerted efforts to dismantle barriers and foster an inclusive political landscape that champions the rights and voices of women. As the World Bank emphasizes, empowerment involves enhancing the capacity of individuals and groups to make informed decisions and translate those into meaningful actions and outcomes.

Women's political engagement is a cornerstone of democratic governance and social justice, yet it remains a complex challenge, particularly in a diverse and populous nation like India (World Bank Poverty Analysis 2003)³. The process of improving the political standing of traditionally impoverished women in society is known as "empowerment of women." Women empowerment is creating a political and social climate in which women can live freely from the fear of discrimination, harassment, exploitation, and other negative aspects of being a woman in a system that has historically been dominated by men. Women all over the world are historically prevented from achieving this kind of empowerment, particularly when it comes from opposite gender. For generations, men have looked down on them

as an option. Almost every country, industrialized or developing, has a track record of mistreating women.

The Reservation Bill of Women, 2023, also known as Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiam, has been approved by both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. This law ensures that one-third seats, state legislative assemblies, and Delhi Assembly are reserved for women in the Lok Sabha. This reservation also includes seats for Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Currently, there are 82 women members in the Lok Sabha, about 15.2% in the Rajya Sabha and 31 female members, which is 13%. Although these numbers have increased by about 5% since the first Lok Sabha, they are much lower than many other countries. The Bill proposed amending the constitution to include Article 330A⁴; this includes provision of burning seats for women and suggests that these reserved seats can be rotated in various constituencies within states and center areas. Additionally, the bill proposes that already one-third seats for SCs and STs should also be reserved for women. As mentioned in the newly introduced Article 332A, this reservation will apply to each state Legislative Assembly.

This research paper aims to explore or focusing on the political role of Women Sarpanch in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, as catalysts for change in their communities. By highlighting their experiences and contributions, we seek to illuminate the path toward a more equitable and just society by the help of survey method.

Research Methodology:

In this Empirical study, we took 220 women sarpanches as a sample drawn from the 6 blocks of Dehradun district- Raipur, Doiwala, Sahaspur, Vikasnagar, Kalsi, and Chakrata. But only 197 women sarpanches responded and 22 didn't responded, that's why we collected data from 197 women sarpanches only. In this study, we have discussed the personal profile of women sarpanch and their role in the political empowerment of women in Dehradun Uttarakhand.

Empirical Analysis of Role of Women Sarpanch in Political Empowerment of Women in Dehradun, Uttarakhand:

To know the personal profile of women sarpanch there have discussed various questions regarding their age, caste, marital status and education.

- On the basis of the data regarding personal profile of women sarpanch we found that at the grassroot level of Dehradun in Uttarakhand maximum participation of

women sarpanch is medium age group (30-40 years, 38.8 percent & 40-50 years, 25.6 percent) and minimum participation is old age group (50-60 years, 7.8 percent). The medium participation of women sarpanch is the young age group (25-30 years, 17.8 percent). On the basis of caste we found that most of the women sarpanch are schedule tribal (ST) class. Actually, the seats are reserved for the tribal women in panchayats, and the some part of the area of study is tribal area. On the basis of marriage the maximum number of women sarpanch are married which is a good or positive sign. As they can get support from their family members and take part in leadership or decision making process. Similarly on the basis of education mostly women sarpanch have gained education and majority of them have done higher secondary education (36.5 percent) and secondary education (26.0 percent).

- To understand the role of women sarpanch in political empowerment some important questions were asked from them: The discussion with tables in this regard has been given below:

Interest in Politics:

It is state that if someone has interest in any kind of work then he/she can devote his/her more contribution to the work. Similarly, when women have interest in politics they will actively take part in it. Otherwise sometimes they take part in politics by forced or to take some undue advantage. So women sarpanches were asked about their interest in politics. The findings of the same have discussed below:

Table: 1- Interest in politics

| S. No. | Interest | Frequency | Percent |
|--------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| 1 | Yes | 170 | 77.6 |
| 2 | No | 19 | 8.7 |
| 3 | Somehow | 8 | 3.7 |
| 4 | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

Decision-making related to Self

Women's political empowerment depends on their ability to make decisions for themselves, which affects both their personal life and the larger political environment. Society can advance towards equality by tackling the challenges that women encounter and working for environments that allow for autonomy.

Table 2: Opinion on decision making related to self

| S.No. | Decision Making | Frequency | Percent |
|-------|-----------------|-----------|---------|
| 1 | Yes | 163 | 74.4 |

| | | | |
|---|--------------|------------|-------------|
| 2 | No | 9 | 4.1 |
| 3 | Sometimes | 20 | 9.1 |
| 4 | No answer | 5 | 2.3 |
| 5 | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

Voting as per own discretion

The act of voting according to one's own discretion is a fundamental aspect of democratic participation and personal autonomy. It gives women the power to stand up for their rights, have an impact on choices, and reshape politics to better represent their needs and goals. For women, exercising the right to vote freely and independently reflects broader issues of empowerment.

Table: 3 Opinion on act of voting as per own discretion

| S.No. | Voting as per own | Frequency | Percent |
|-------|-------------------|------------|-------------|
| 1 | Yes | 185 | 84.5 |
| 2 | No | 12 | 5.5 |
| 3 | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

Membership of political organizations:

Participating in political organisations is essential for women sarpanches to become more powerful in politics since it gives them a voice in decision-making processes, advances gender equality, and guarantees that women's issues are taken into consideration. Their participation motivates more women to take part, challenges societal norms, and develops leadership abilities, all of which contribute to more inclusive leadership.

| Table 4: - Membership of political organizations | | | |
|---|--------------|------------|-------------|
| S.No. | Membership | Frequency | Percent |
| 1 | Yes | 113 | 51.6 |
| 2 | No | 84 | 38.4 |
| 3 | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

Women participation in group activities:

To promote community development and guarantee that a range of viewpoints are represented in local governance, women involvement in the many events that Panchayats host at the local level is essential. Women participation can greatly improve the efficacy and inclusivity of the various tasks that panchayats are tasked with carrying out, from social welfare initiatives to infrastructure development.

| Table: 5 Opinion on Women participation in group activities | | | |
|--|----------------------|------------------|----------------|
| S.No. | Participation | Frequency | Percent |
| 1 | Very active | 45 | 20.5 |
| 2 | Sometimes active | 134 | 61.2 |
| 3 | Not active | 18 | 8.2 |
| 4 | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

Communication with people during election:

Women Sarpanches interact with voters during elections by using a combination of traditional and modern communication techniques. Through effective utilization of these platforms, they can interact with the public, respond to issues, and win over supporters—all of which will help them win local elections. On the basis of data we discussed what different medium used by women sarpanch during election to communicate with people in their area.

Table: 6 Different Medium used Communication with people during election

| S. No. | Medium use for communication during Election | Options | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------|---|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Going door to door | Yes | 187 | 85.4 |
| | | No | 10 | 4.6 |
| | | Total | 197 | 90.0 |
| 2 | By the help of Party workers | Yes | 50 | 22.8 |
| | | No | 147 | 67.1 |
| | | Total | 197 | 90.0 |
| 3 | Go to village chaupals | Yes | 82 | 37.4 |
| | | No | 115 | 52.5 |
| | | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

Panchayat meetings:

Women sarpanches depend on panchayat meetings because they give them an opportunity for engaged involvement in local governance, which empowers them to speak out for the needs of their community. They can have an impact on decisions that affect women's rights, access to resources, and general growth by participating

in these conversations. If they don't show up, they run the risk of losing their voice, becoming less effective advocates for women's causes.

| Table 7: - Panchayat meetings by themselves | | | |
|--|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| S.No. | Options | Frequency | Percent |
| 1 | Yes | 145 | 66.2 |
| 2 | Sometimes | 51 | 23.3 |
| 3 | Never | 1 | .5 |
| 4 | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

Nature of participation in Panchayat meetings:

As a Sarpanch means being well-prepared, communicating, interacting with participants, and demonstrating leadership. In Panchayat meetings, anyone can significantly affect what happens and contribute to good local governance by supporting inclusive and evidence-based policies, encouraging collaboration, and making sure decisions are followed through. On the basis of data we discussed that women sarpanch presented their views freely in panchayat meetings.

| Table 7.1: -Opinion on Present their views in meetings | | | |
|---|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| S.No. | Options | Frequency | Percent |
| 1 | Yes | 191 | 87.2 |
| 2 | No | 4 | 1.8 |
| 3 | Sometimes | 2 | .9 |
| 4 | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

To make aware about the governmental programs & schemes:

Women Sarpanches keep women in their areas informed about government initiatives and activities using a variety of media. Through the use of digital platforms, local media, traditional techniques, and personal contact, they effectively engage and inform women, empowering them to take advantage of the opportunities and benefit these programs offers. On the basis of data we discussed what different medium used by women sarpanch to aware women in area for government schemes and programmes to empower them.

Table 8: Different Medium use to make women aware about government programs & schemes

| S.No. | Medium use to make women aware | Options | Frequency | Percent |
|-------|--------------------------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| 1 | Through SHG | Yes | 171 | 78.1 |
| | | No | 26 | 11.9 |
| | | Total | 197 | 90.0 |
| 2 | Through phone call | Yes | 71 | 32.4 |
| | | No | 126 | 57.5 |
| | | Total | 197 | 90.0 |
| 3 | Through self-contact | Yes | 112 | 51.1 |
| | | No | 85 | 38.8 |
| | | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

To provide Political information:

Women sarpanches play an important part in empowering women politically by bridge the knowledge gap and promoting informed involvement through the sharing of political information. With this knowledge, women are ready to speak up against inequality, take part in local decision-making, and represent their demands. By exchanging knowledge, female sarpanches promote a more knowledgeable female electorate as well as strengthen their own leadership, which suitable political environment for women.

Table 9: Opinion on to provide political information to women

| S. No. | Options | Frequency | Percent |
|--------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| 1 | Yes | 184 | 84.0 |
| 2 | No | 8 | 3.7 |
| 3 | Sometimes | 5 | 2.3 |
| 4 | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

Participation in discussion on political issues with women:

Women's engagement in political discourse can lead to more comprehensive and representative policymaking and enrich the overall democratic process. It ensures that diverse perspectives are included in decision-making processes, leads to more representative policies, and contributes to a more inclusive and equitable political environment.

Table: 10 – Participated in discussion on political issues with women

| S. No. | Discussion with women | Frequency | Percent |
|--------|-----------------------|------------|-------------|
| 1 | Yes | 132 | 60.3 |
| 2 | No | 65 | 29.7 |
| 3 | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

Political Rules, Decisions, Laws and Policies related to Women:

Discussing political laws, norms, and policies with other women sarpanches in meetings is essential because it helps them better understand government and makes sure that women's viewpoints are taken into account when making decisions. Through these conversations, they have the ability to speak up in favour of laws that advance equality, deal with difficulties that are unique to women, and rally support in their communities. Women sarpanches may influence significant change,

Table 11: - Discussed political Rules, Decisions, Laws and Policies related to Women in the Group

| S.No. | Options | Frequency | Percent |
|-------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| 1 | Yes | 195 | 89.0 |
| 2 | No | 1 | .5 |
| 3 | Sometimes | 1 | .5 |
| 4 | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

encourage other women to get involved in politics.

Woman as a Sarpanch at village:

Selecting women candidates for sarpanches in local self-governments is beneficial as it advances equal representation of women, guarantees of viewpoints in the process of making decisions, and strengthens the bonds between communities. Women leaders have the ability to tackle issues specific to their communities, serve as role models for upcoming female leaders, and promote inclusive governance, which can result in more representative and successful local policies.

| Table 12: -Opinion on woman as a Sarpanch of the village | | | |
|---|-------------------|------------------|----------------|
| S. No. | Options | Frequency | Percent |
| 1 | Strongly agree | 45 | 20.5 |
| 2 | Agree | 150 | 68.5 |
| 3 | Strongly disagree | 2 | .9 |
| 4 | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

To provide more opportunities to women to be empowered

Due in large part to laws that promote women and a growing awareness of the value of women leadership in local administration, women had more possibilities to be empowered as sarpanches in recent years. Because a significant number of panchayat seats are now reserved for women because of the implementation of reservation laws, many women now have the opportunity of holding leadership positions where they can stand up for local problems and initiate initiatives that promote development. Family and community support for women in leadership roles has also changed as a result of a greater understanding of equal opportunities for women. Women Sarpanches have been able to make a real difference in their local areas by working for issues like economic development, health, and education because to their increased visibility and empowerment. An empowering chain that promotes greater social change and the growth of women in politics is promoted when more women accept these roles and share their experiences, encouraging others to do the same.

| Table 12 Opinion on to provide more opportunities to women to be empower | | | |
|---|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| S. No. | Options | Frequency | Percent |
| 1 | Strongly Agree | 57 | 26.0 |
| 2 | Agree | 139 | 63.5 |
| 3 | Disagree | 1 | .5 |
| 4 | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

Reservation is necessary in the Center and state Legislatures:

In order to guarantee women's representation in decision-making processes, reservations for women in local self-government at both the state and federal levels are essential for gender empowerment. Women are encouraged to actively participate in politics by this policy, which aids in breaking down structural barriers.

Table 13: Opinion on reservation is necessary in the Center and state Legislatures

| S. No. | Options | Frequency | Percent |
|--------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| 1 | Yes | 192 | 87.7 |
| 2 | No | 5 | 2.3 |
| 3 | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

Political Ambitions:

After serving their term, women senators should be motivated by ambition because it will encourage them to take on more leadership positions, support

| Table 15: - Opinion on Feeling comfortable at work place | | | |
|---|---------|-----------|---------|
| S.No. | Options | Frequency | Percent |

| S. No. | Political Ambitions | Options | Frequency | Percent |
|--------|--|--------------|------------|-------------|
| 1 | Take part in election again | Yes | 129 | 58.9 |
| | | No | 68 | 31.1 |
| | | Total | 197 | 90.0 |
| 2 | Take part in politics | Yes | 10 | 4.6 |
| | | No | 187 | 85.4 |
| | | Total | 197 | 90.0 |
| 3 | Take part in state or national politics | Yes | 24 | 11.0 |
| | | No | 173 | 79.0 |
| | | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

more significant social issues, and serve as role models for other women. This goal may result in continued political participation and a greater impact on local government.

Table 14: -Opinion on Political Ambitions**Comfortable at work place:**

For women to be politically empowered, they must feel comfortable in their working place since this builds their self-esteem and motivates them to actively participate in decision-making. They are better able to express their thoughts, question social conventions, and interact with their communities in a supportive setting. By encouraging more women to seek political positions, this empowerment not only improves their leadership abilities but also advances equality in government.

| | | | |
|----------|------------------|------------|-------------|
| 1 | Very comfortable | 71 | 32.4 |
| 2 | Not comfortable | 126 | 57.5 |
| 3 | Total | 197 | 90.0 |

Challenges faced by Women

Participation in politics is not easy for women, they have faced various challenges. Based on this study we found that women sarpanch faced several challenges they have been described below:

1) Low level of Education

Dehradun district has a low percentage of educated women, particularly in rural areas. According to the study, traditional beliefs frequently give a higher priority to boy's education than girls, which causes difference in enrolment ratio. Families might experience financial difficulties which would lead them to give preference to boys schooling while expecting girls to help out with domestic chores. Although many girls are expected to marry before finishing their education, cultural customs around early marriage may interrupt their education. Also poor school infrastructure might make it more difficult to get a good education, especially in rural areas.

2) Lack of economic opportunity and poverty

Women's representation and involvement in politics is greatly impacted by low financial support for their political activity in the Dehradun district. Because some women sarpanch came from middle class family who doesn't have enough budget for election. There are few strategies like Low funding schemes, mentorship programs, and district projects that support women's political and economic empowerment.

3) Poor Health

Women's health and safety concerns are crucial for the welfare of a nation and play a significant role in measuring the degree to which women can exercise political influence. On the other hand, there are concerning issues with maternal healthcare, especially in rural areas. Inequalities in women's access to healthcare and education impede their growth, which hurts their health and job opportunities.

4) Discrimination and inequality at the workplace

According to the study at the panchayat level, inequality for women acting as sarpanches can take many forms, particularly in the workplace and in public places. Such as:

- **Restricted power and Decision-making ability:** It can be difficult for women sarpanches to establish their authority. Since decision-making may be largely dominated by males, women's are merely seen as a symbolic figure with actual little influence.
- **Insufficient Support and resources:** Women at these positions don't have the same resources or assistance as males do. This can hinder their efficiency and because of that they have restricted access to mentorship opportunities.

5) Cultural customs and social standards

Due to deeply rooted stereotypes men are generally viewed as leaders and decision-makers in many societies. Women are expected to put family obligations ahead of public life, which restricts their ability to participate in politics. Women who aspires for political positions faces societal stigma. They could fear condemnation and retaliation from their communities if they are perceived as deviating from established norms. Males mainly presides over the meetings of the panchayats, because of that women's find it difficult to develop their political skills and capabilities. The lack of female role models in leadership positions can deter other women from pursuing political careers. Lack of female leadership may reinforce the belief that politics is not a good area for women.

6) Household responsibility

According to the study, most of the women sarpanches give importance to their household chores more than their sarpanch duties. Men mainly do the political work of women sarpanch, but don't assist them in their household chores. Families may prioritize women's domestic responsibilities over their political aspirations because of societal expectations, but this dynamic frequently perpetuates traditional gender roles. Women's mobility can become limited by domestic responsibilities, which makes it challenging for them to participate in politics or establish connections with other figures of power.

Suggestions:

1) Women's Education

The key problem that needs to be addressed first and foremost is women's education. Therefore, greater attention needs to be given to women's education.

2) Political Training to women

To provide Political Literacy and Leadership development training to women there should be offer instruction in strategic planning, negotiating, and public speaking.

There should be organizing programs such as workshops, seminars aimed to educating women on political rights and procedures.

3) Increased Employment Possibilities for Women

The constitution of India provides equal opportunity to men and women equally but in reality women don't enjoy the equal opportunity in the field of career options, even though they contribute significantly to social and economic progress. The promotion of quality jobs and governmental policies that support growth and development can be greatly aided by equal rights activities.

4) Invest Both Financially and Emotionally in Women's Professional Ideas

Giving women job opportunities is a good method for addressing the gender gap. The government can take steps to provide women with business training so they can find better employment. Considering global trends, a large number of developing countries invest a portion of their yearly income in the advancement of women. The unfair pay gap can be eliminated from the socio-economic context by supporting women's education and giving them the opportunity for business ownership, which will encourage them to participate more in the production process.

5) Leadership positions and decision-making authority to women

Gender equality is a fairy tale in most of the world, even though many women are now significant contributors to the economies of several states. In addition to energy and climate change, women are now actively involved in the tech sector, food production, natural resource management, home wellness, and entrepreneurship. However, the majority of women remain without chances for suitable employment prospects and tools for obtaining higher-paying positions. As attention turns to inclusive economic frameworks, empowering women through leadership roles and decision-making participation can help achieve women's empowerment.

6) Gender equality at political parties and legislatures

Promoting gender equality inside political parties and legislatures guarantees a minimum level of female representation. According to research, taking such steps can promote more equal political environments and include the opinions of women in decision-making processes.

7) Financial support:

For female candidates, financial resources must be available. More women will be able to run for office if specific grants or financing programs are established to aid with election expenses. Having financial support can also free up women to concentrate on their efforts without having to worry about money problems.

8) Campaigns for Awareness:

It is possible to change societal beliefs by launching public awareness efforts that stress the value of women participating in politics. These initiatives can encourage people to get involved in politics by highlighting the accomplished achievements of women leaders and the benefits of female representation.

Conclusion

Encouraging women to participate in politics especially at the panchayat level - sex quota or legal reforms only need to be pushed. It asks for a thoughtful and flexible approach that supports women in real, practical ways. This involves providing financial assistance, leading to lead development opportunities, and empowering women to step into leadership roles. However, there are still many obstacles to overcome, such as deep roots cultural prejudice, lack of resources in decision making places. In fact, to promote the political participation of women, we need to create inclusive communities, raise awareness about political processes and support the ground level. In Dehradun, we have seen promising progress, inspired by community -led initiatives, which have helped women get better access to finance, healthcare, education and opportunities in politics. These efforts have given many women confident to take leadership roles and actively shape their communities - leading to real, visible changes on the ground. But challenges remain faced by women in different ways. Cultural prejudices are still deeply surrounded, and it continuously supports and advocates for moving forward. But if we are committed and work to create an environment where women feel really supported, we can move beyond listening to their voices in politics - we can make sure that they are really valuable and respected. In addition to the community's active participation, governmental and non-governmental organizations must maintain their commitment to addressing these concerns. The State Government can enhance its efforts to empower women at the grassroots level and ultimately support wider social, economic, and political development objectives by creating an inclusive atmosphere and advocating for gender equality. At every level-national, state, and local (like panchayats)-There are policies aimed at strengthening women in areas such as health, education, economic freedom, security from gender-based violence and political participation. But alone policies are not enough. As a society, we need to actively create places where women can flourish - where they are free to make their choice and participate in every aspect of life completely, whether it is social, political or economic.

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