

## **Local Self-Governance a Right Platform for Empowering Rural Women**

**Adline Shanta Tigga**

### **ABSTRACT**

Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) is beginning to transform the process and priorities of local Government in India as well as the women also have been brought into politics. Women representation in the Panchayati Raj system is a unique experiment which translates the idea of empowerment of women in reality. The process of challenging the existing power relation and gaining great control over the sources of power may be termed as empowerment. At the same time empowerment is an active, multidimensional process, which enable women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It is not a commodity to be transmitted nor can it be given away, power has to be required and once acquired it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved. Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation decision making and transformative action. This paper is an attempt to know extent of empowerment of panchayat women. The study was carried out in Pusa Block of Samastipur district in Bihar. In order to have a clear understanding of the extent of women empowerment through local self governance, the study included both the positional women leader of gram panchayats of Pusa block and reputational women leader of this institution. The data obtained were quantified and put to statistical analysis for drawing meaningful conclusions. This paper concluded that there was an overall positive impact of increased participation of women in Gram Panchayats.

**Keywords:** Decision making, Empowerment, Gram panchayat, Local self governance

### **INTRODUCTION**

The evolution of women's representation in the panchayat in the decades of 1980's and 1990's as finally included in the seventy third amendment make an interesting reading. It also helps in understanding the motivation in its introduction, the invisible limit in the political commitment and challenge that women face in using this new political space. The committee on the status of women in India noted in 1974, the ineffectiveness of the taken representation of women in panchayat and staying away from a bolder initiative, recommended as a transitional measure, statutory women's panchayat as part of the panchayat structure. With the implementation of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act, 1992, India is at a crucial

structure in the evaluation of Panchayati Raj institution the Indian brand of rural local self Government. It has envisioned people's participation in the process of planning, decision making, implementation and delivery system. The panchayat Acts of State Governments have subsequently been amended to incorporate the stipulations of the Central Acts thus the constitutional mandate has heralded uniform pattern throughout Indian states. Manikyamba (1989) in her study of Andhra Pradesh found that socio-economic background in general and political backgrounds in particular are important determinants of shaping the nature and level of participation of member in political institutions. The study further revealed that education and participation were interrelated and economic status gave a sense of confidence and encouragement to participate.

Although empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation decision making and transformative action the participation of the poor women members is mostly found in significant. Present research is an effort of understanding the extent of women empowerment through local self governance,

### METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Pusa Block of Samastipur district in Bihar. The selection of the district and its Community Development Block i.e. Pusa Block was made purposively with the consideration that the Panchayati Raj in the state was just nascent and so the structural as well as the functional status of Panchayat in different blocks of the district might not have changed much. In order to have a clear difference of the extent of women empowerment through local self governance, the study included both the positional women leader of gram panchayats of Pusa block and reputational women leader of this institution (50 each). The data obtained were quantified and put to statistical analysis by using different statistical tools for drawing meaningful conclusions. The participation in five major activities to four different extents (<25%, 25-50%, 50-75% and >75%) were measured. On the basis of the participation scores obtained by the respondents, participation index was calculated with the help of the formula given below.

$$\text{Participation Index} = \frac{\text{Score obtained}}{\text{Maximum possible score}} \times 100$$

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The success of any programme depends to a fact extent or the degree and nature of participation by all concerned in its planning execution and evaluation. The intensity of participation in the proceedings of the programmes play crucial role in accomplishing the tasks and achieving the objectives. With this concept in mind, the extent and nature of participation of positional women leader and the reputational women leader was studied and vice-versa to see their empowerment. The finding has been presented through Table 1.

It is evident from Table 1 that the maximum participation in selection of project was recorded by the comparison to positional women leader and the reputational women leader. There were (14.0%) of the positional women leader who were reported to participate and play effective roles in selection of the project. The magnitude of participation was more than 75.0 per cent. Further 16.0 and 18.0 per cent members were found to participate in this activity to the extent of 50.0 to 75.0 per cent and 25.0-50.0 per cent, respectively. Thus, the rest, majority of the respondents of the positional women leader had the lowest degree of participation i.e. less than 25.0 per cent. The pattern of participation was similarly observed in case of the reputational women leader too. Among these leaders, also 14.0 per cent mentioned to be participating in the selection of projects at the tune of more than 75.0 per cent and 60, 12 and 14 per cent reputational women leaders participated in selection of the projects to the extent upto 25 per cent, 25.0 to 50.0

**Table 1: Participation of positional women leader and reputational women leader in local self governance (N=50)**

Activities	Extent of participation							
	Positional women leader				Reputational women leader			
	< 25%	25-50%	50-75%	>75%	< 25%	25-50%	50-75%	>75%
Selection of projects	26 (52.0)	9 (18.0)	8 (16.0)	7 (14.0)	30 (60.0)	6 (12.0)	7 (14.0)	7 (14.0)
Planning for execution of the projects	28 (56.0)	11 (22.0)	5 (10.0)	6 (12.0)	33 (66.0)	6 (12.0)	9 (18.0)	2 (4.0)
Allotment and release of fund for the projects	27 (54.0)	11 (22.0)	6 (12.0)	6 (12.0)	41 (82.0)	4 (8.0)	6 (12.0)	-
Initiation of the work	26 (52.0)	10 (20.0)	8 (16.0)	6 (12.0)	31 (62.0)	11 (22.0)	3 (6.0)	5 (10.0)
Selection of workers to conduct the projects	28 (56.0)	7 (14.0)	10 (20.0)	5 (10.0)	32 (64.0)	11 (22.0)	3 (6.0)	4 (8.0)

\*Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage.

per cent and 50-75 per cent, respectively. On clubbing the positional women leader and reputational women leaders separately in two groups on the basis of extent of participation below 50.0 per cent and above 50.0 per cent it can be seen that there were 75.0 per cent reputational women leader found to be participating poorly as compared to 50.0 per cent among the positional women leaders. The extent of participation recorded in respect of other activities. In planning for the execution of the projects 22 per cent positional women leader were found to participate to the extent of more than 50.0 per cent. Among the 2<sup>nd</sup> group of leaders also 22.0 per cent reported to participate to this extent. With respect to the extent of participation by positional women leader in allotment and release of funds for the projects appeared to be partial only. There were 54.0 per cent members with less than 25.0 per cent participation. Among the reputational women leaders the number at such a low level of participation swelled to 82.0 per cent. In the initiation of the work only 14.0 per cent the positional women leaders were found to participate to the extent of more than 50.0 per cent. Among the reputational women leader only 16.0 per cent were found to participate to this extent. With respect to selection of contractors/workers to conduct the projects only 30.0 per cent positional leaders were found to be able to participate to the extent of more than 50.0 per cent and the situation was found more worse in the extent of participation in this activity for reputational leaders which was only 14.0 per cent. 64.0 per cent reputational women leaders substantially had low level of participation. Their participation intensity scores were less than 25.0 per cent. There were 30.0 per cent positional leader who had medium level of participation. The participation index score of 20.0 per cent member were between 50.0 to 75.0

per cent and that of the rest 18.0 per cent members above 75.0 per cent. There were 16.0 and 12.0 per cent reputational women leaders had high and very high levels participation.

Thus it can be concluded from Table 1, the contention of that both positional and reputational women leader had low level of participation in various developmental activities of Gram panchayat. To what extent this level of participation of the women folk, especially of the positional leaders to the local self governances could be helpful in fulfilling the objectives may be a subject of investigation in future studies. However, it is certain that present reputational leader were found participating to the extent of more than 50.0 per cent. It is revealed from the above table that the both women leaders were not finding it convenient to participate fully in various roles of local self governance. Although the members were slightly better off in frequency of participation in the decision making for approval of the projects of development in a gram panchayat, at their different stages, there appeared to be a large scope for improvement unless suitable measures are taken to improve the extent of participation by the positional women leaders and the reputational women leaders of the projects, this base institution may not be able to rise to the expectations made from it. Singh (2001) also reported that panchayat organization lack adequate participation and involvement of all section of rural society in its functioning.

On the basis of the participation scores obtained by the respondents, participation index was calculated and the observation thus obtained is presented in Table 2. On perusal of Table 2 it is indicated that 32.0 per cent positional leaders position is a matter of great concern.

**Table 2: Magnitude of participation by positional women leader and reputational women leader as indicated by participation index score (N=50)**

Level of participation	Positional women leader		Reputational women leader	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Low (P.I. < 25%)	16	(32.0)	22	(44.0)
Medium (P.I. 25-50%)	15	(30.0)	14	(32.0)
High (P.I. 50-75 %)	10	(20.0)	8	(16.0)
Very high (P.I. > 75%)	9	(18.0)	6	(12.0)

### CONCLUSION

Positional women leaders participation in the local self governance was more than the reputational women leaders but not much satisfactory, in terms of the period of commencement of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment. Still both the categories of women were not much empowered. They were feeling inconvenient to participate fully in various programmes of gram panchayats. There is a need of capacity building of women leaders and the gram panchayat institution in providing right platform in local self governance so that substantial change may take place.

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