



**Panchayati Raj Institution in J&K and Women  
Empowerment**

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**Abstract:**

Women empowerment is important aspect of every society. Giving women the same opportunities, resources, and authority over decisions as men is the process of empowering women. Equal access to healthcare, work, education, and political engagement is a component of women's empowerment. In order to empower women, societal conventions and impediments that restrict their potential and hinder them from fully participating in society must be dismantled. Empowerment also entails giving them access to the skills and assets they need to succeed, such as mentorship programmes, leadership development opportunities, and financial resources. Women who are empowered have the potential to significantly influence social and economic progress in both their personal lives and in their communities. Women should be given equal opportunities in order to create an egalitarian environment. Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to analyse women empowerment through Panchayati raj institution in India, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir.

**Key Words:** Panchayat, Empowerment, SHG, Local Self Government, Reservation

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**Introduction:**

In India, panchayats—local self-governing institutions—makes a substantial contribution to the grassroots promotion of women's empowerment. The following are some ways that panchayats can support women's empowerment. Women's political representation and engagement has increased because to the panchayat system of reserving seats for women, particularly at the local level. As a result, women now have a voice in local decision-making processes, and their leadership abilities have been enhanced. Furthermore, panchayats support women's access to resources including education, credit, and land. Panchayats supports policies and initiatives that benefit women and help to alleviate gender-based inequality through their participation in local governance. Panchayats can contribute to the fight against gender-based violence by developing systems for reporting and handling cases of violence against women. So in this regard, this paper makes an attempt to study the relation between women empowerment and panchayat in Jammu and Kashmir.

## **Conceptualizing Women Empowerment**

Empowerment refers to create conducive condition for people or groups provides the ability to take charge of their life and make choices that have an impact on their wellbeing. It entails providing people with the tools, information, and abilities they need to take control of their and reach their full potential.

Women empowerment refers to the process of providing women with the necessary tools, resources, opportunities, and rights to achieve their full potential and participate equally in various spheres of life. It involves challenging and changing the existing social, economic, cultural, and political structures that limit women's abilities and hinder their progress.

Women empowerment aims to create an environment where women can make decisions and have control over their lives, enabling them to pursue their goals and dreams without facing discrimination, inequality, or gender-based violence. It recognizes that women have the right to equal opportunities in education, employment, leadership, and decision-making processes.

### **Following are the key aspects of women empowerment:**

**Education:** Access to quality education is crucial for women's empowerment. It equips them with knowledge, skills, and confidence to participate in society, pursue careers, and make informed choices.

**Economic empowerment:** This involves ensuring equal economic opportunities for women, including fair wages, entrepreneurship support, access to financial services, and vocational training. Economic empowerment enables women to achieve financial independence and contribute to the overall development of their communities.

**Health and well-being:** Women's health and well-being are essential for empowerment. It includes access to healthcare services, reproductive rights, maternal and child health, and addressing issues such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and harmful traditional practices.

**Political participation:** Women's representation and participation in political processes and decision-making bodies are vital for inclusive governance. Empowering women politically involves promoting their leadership roles, supporting their involvement in policymaking, and ensuring their voices are heard.

**Legal and human rights:** Ensuring women's legal rights and protection from discrimination is crucial for empowerment. This includes addressing gender-based violence, promoting equal opportunities, and eliminating discriminatory laws and practices.

**Social and cultural change:** Women empowerment involves challenging social norms, stereotypes, and cultural practices that perpetuate gender inequality. It aims to create a society where women are respected, valued, and treated equally.

**Support networks and mentorship:** Building supportive networks and mentorship programs can provide women with guidance, encouragement, and opportunities for growth. These networks offer a platform for knowledge sharing, skill development, and empowerment.

The literature on women's empowerment has also been influenced by political scientist Anne-Marie Goetz. Women's empowerment, according to Goetz, is the process of combating and altering institutional structures, power dynamics, and gender stereotypes that restrict women's freedom. women's autonomy and agency. Goetz contends that in addition to individual empowerment, institutional change is also necessary for women's empowerment, including changes to the legal system, political institutions, and societal standards

Feminist academics have made a substantial contribution to the conversation on the empowerment of women in the subject of women's studies. According to feminist researchers, empowering women entails more than merely giving them more access to resources and chances, but also about combating the patriarchal systems of power that discriminate against women. According to feminist scholars, addressing issues like gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and women's political representation is necessary for women to be empowered.

Sociology offers yet another viewpoint on the empowerment of women. According to sociologist Arlie Hochschild, tackling the "second shift," or the unpaid work that women perform in the home, is necessary for empowering women. According to Hochschild, empowering women calls for more than just expanding their access to education and career, as well as shifting gender roles and standards within the home. Therefore, the academics from many professions have offered various viewpoints on the empowerment of women. Although there isn't a universally accepted definition of what constitutes women's empowerment, researchers usually concur that it entails giving women more agency and autonomy to make decisions that have an impact on their lives and well-being. In order to empower women, it is necessary to overcome systemic injustices and power dynamics that limit women's access to opportunities and resources.

Although so many research works have already done on women and panchayats but there is lack of literature on women and panchayat. For example Deepa Kylasam Iyer argue that although the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution was passed more than three decades ago, there has been little research on the experiences and effects of women in panchayats. She explains this by pointing to things like insufficient financing and a lack of institutional support.

Therefore, the main focus of this article is to study the role of panchayat in empowering women.

India's panchayat system plays a crucial role in the empowerment of women. Local self-government organisations known as panchayats are in charge of grassroots administration and the provision of essential services. Women now make up a larger portion of local government due to the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, which provides the reservation of seats for them in panchayats.

### **Evolution of Panchayati Raj Institution in India:**

The beginning of Panchayati Raj in India can be traced in in 1882 when Lord Ripon past origin passed local self -government resolution in 1882. The meaning of panchayat is when people take their problems at Panchayati level to resolve their issues. After independence government of India designated Balwant rai Mehta committee in 1957 to study the performance of community development programme (1952and National Extension service (1953). Rajasthan was the first state to established Panchayati institution. (Banti Kumar, Pawan Kumar, Bhumika prasad, Anoupa Devi and Baljeet Singh 2017). The Panchayati institution main motive is to take panchayat act into grassroot level. Balwant Rai Mehta Committee in January 1957. Before this there are 2 programs i.e., Community development program in 1952, National Extension Service in 1953 to implement both these program, Balwant Rai Mehta committee was constituted. It's report submitted in November 1957 and he said there should be democratic decentralization which is known It's report submitted in

north 1957 and he said there should be democratic which is Called Panchayati Raj institution. Balwant Rai Mehta suggested 'Three tire system 'Zila parishad (District level), Panchayat samiti (Block level), Gram panchayat (village level). It was accepted by NDC. National development council in 1958. These 3-tier system was firstly adopted by nagaur in Rajasthan, 2 October 1959. Though, it was completely accepted by Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Bihar and Himachal Pradesh. Gram panchayat lie in the village level and its directly elected representatives. There are 5 to 31 members including Pradhan. The chairman of gram panchayat is also Pradhan. All the decisions which were taken by panchayat they have to give answer to gram Sabha. All adults living in panchayat are members of gram Sabha. There are special reservations for ST, SC & Women in village level. Panchayat samiti (block level) In which one block there are 20 to 60 villages and there are direct elections. The head of the block level is known as Pramukh. Those states in which the population is less than 20,00,000 there is no need of block level Zila parishad the Elections are held directly the head of zila parishad is district collector.

The first election that was conducted under the act of 1889 was held in 2001 after a gap of 12 years. Even if they were unable to give satisfactory results in every part of the state because of the pre- dominant situation. Therefore, the panchayat institution was unable to work properly in the state in the last 2 decades. After the 73rd amendment act 1993 the Panchayati institutions in different parts of the country expanded. (Mohammad Iqbal Ganie, Sona Shukla, 2019). In Panchayati Raj institution the presentation of women was distorted till the neck meant of the Panchayati Raj act (1992) Introduced as a 73rd amendment to the constitution of India guarantee 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj institution. Clause 3 of article 243D authorized not less than one – third reservation for women out of total number of seats of panches and sarpanches to be occupied by direct elections. Article 243D provides special reservation for the SC and the ST in every panchayat who belonging to this category (Abha Chauhan, 2022). Before the starting of the Panchayati raj system in entire country, the state of J&K was the first state to pass 'Jammu and Kashmir village panchayat act of 1958'. Despite Jammu and Kashmir has introduced many acts in regard to rural local self-governing bodies but the Panchayati raj act of 1989 was not remarkable. It was the first time when an act was named a 'Panchayati Raj 'instead of village panchayat act. Although women had not been an integral part of this act. Before the 73rd amendment only male played a minute role in local self- governing institution. (Ashwani Kumar, oct 2012)

### **Panchayati Raj Institution in J&K and Women Empowerment:**

A fundamental phase in India's democratic decentralisation movement from the central government to rural government is the Panchayati Raj system. The Panchayati Raj system is the only one that offers the villagers a wonderful opportunity for full democracy, local level development process, political awareness, protection of rights, democratic decision-making process, and political power. The Panchayati Raj system, which offers all governmental policies and development functions to villagers, is actually beneficial.

The process of empowering women involves encouraging them to assert their rights to equal opportunity in the political, social, cultural, and economic realms of life and to reach their full potential. For this advancement to have an impact on how social change happens, it must go hand in hand with their autonomy in making decisions. In fact, empowerment is a bottom-up process rather than a top-down approach that may be developed. This means that neither can

development organisations claim to "empower women," nor can empowerment be outlined in particular actions or outcomes. This is due to the fact that it entails a process whereby women, both individually and collectively, independently examine, develop, and express their wants and interests without having them pre-defined or imposed from above. Therefore, those seeking to empower women must devise strategies for empowering women to critically analyse their circumstances and influence social change. The ultimate objective of women's empowerment is for women to actively participate in changing gender relations. In this process of women's empowerment, panchayats play a vital role. J&K is also making efforts to empower women through panchayats.

#### **Schedule caste/Tribe of Jammu and Kashmir**

There are 12 schedule tribes in Jammu and Kashmir including Balti, Beda, Boto, Changpa, Mon, Garra, Purigpa (Brokpa, Drokpa, Dard, Shim Gujjar, Bakarwal, Gaddi, and Sippi. Out of these twelve, first eight tribes got schedule tribe status in 1989, rest for Gujjar, Bakarwal, Gaddi, Sippi got it in 1991.... According to the census of 2011, there are about 1493299 schedule caste persons in J&K out of total about 11.9% of schedule caste all over the India and 1.43% population is from Jammu and Kashmir. Total there are 12 schedule caste tribes but Gujjar grasp the greatest share followed by Bakarwals and Gaddis. Mostly of the tribal people belong from the nomadic and non-nomadic section. Due to nomadic they take no interest or no part in election process. (Banti Kumar, Pawan Kumar, Bhumika Prasad, Anoupa Devi and Baljeet Singh)

**Reservation in Panchayati raj institution for SC/ST women** The subject of women participation in political issues in all around the world started to gain significance in around 1975 when UN announced 1975 as an international women year. The UN's decade for women continues with the theme 'Equality, Development and Peace.' In India's this subject of participation of women. Decision making drew the attention of common for status of women in India (CSWI) in 1974. It was the status report that was represented by the CSWI in India with the title, towards equality 1974 and this report came out as a trauma to the India women who felt that even after the 27 years of independence, they were not only performing the traditional roles that are expected from them by the society and men, but also they were assumed by illiteracy, poor health, low employment and they had negligible role in the decision making process in any part of life. The 73rd amendment act was passed in 1992 by parliament of India and also there are 33% reservations for women along with SC/ST women. Bihar became the very first state in India that provided 50% reservation along with SC/ST women. Himachal Pradesh also followed the same. Jharkhand too expanded it even to 55%. In 2003 in spite of applying provisions of 73rd amendment act government of J&K amended its J&K Panchayati raj act 1989 to provide 33% reservation to women including SC/ST and women vide SRO 181 dated 17-06-2004 (Banti Kumar, Pawan Kumar, Bhumika Prasad, Anoupa Devi and Baljeet Singh, 2017)

#### **Women's representation in Jammu and Kashmir Panchayat Elections:**

Panchayati Raj institutions have been mainly controlled by men till the 73rd amendment was passed in 1993 to guarantee 33% reservation for women. J&K has presented 33% of reservation in its Halqa panchayat through the J&K Panchayati Raj (2nd amendment) act 2003. In 2011 almost 10,000 women were elected as panches by panchayat election. India the largest democracy in the world, has just 10.8% representation of women in the Lok Sabha,

with 59 out of 545 members being female. Women play a very important role in guaranteeing the involvement of elected representation in decision making. Out of the 233 members of the Rajya Sabha only 21 women, or 9% are female. (Mohammad Iqbal Ganie, Sona Shukla ,2019). After 1978 and a gap of 23 years, Jammu and Kashmir had its panch election in 2001. Due to the lack of a provision for seat reservation for women, just 2.46% of the candidates in these elections were females. While in other regions of India, 33% of the Panchayat seats were set aside for women. With a very poor turnout, the 2001 elections in Jammu and Kashmir were generally not very successful. They sparked fear, danger, uncertainty, and tension in Kashmir. Only 208 of the 2348 Baramullah constituencies, 152 of the 1,695 Kupwara constituencies, and 53 of the 759 Srinagar constituencies had voting in the valley region. All 1,022 Budgam constituencies were empty throughout the voting period. Due to security concerns, the panchayat elections that were scheduled to occur in the state of J&K in 2006 were not held. Although, the election held in 2011 mirrored a favorable image because about 80 -82% of the electorate exercised their right to vote. From April 13 until June 18,2011,16 different phrases were used in the election. According to the record of chief electoral officer, 29,719 panches and 4130 sarpanches in all were elected, and close to 6 lakh voters cast their ballots. For the first time,9424 people were elected as panch and 33% of constituencies were reserved for women. Very few women were elected to the position of sarpanch because no seats were set aside for them. Only 28 women were elected to the 4,113 sarpanch posts. Out of 22 districts of the state in 11 district they were no women sarpanches. In the two districts of Leh & Kargil of Ladakh region there were no women elected as sarpanch. In the Jammu division excluding Kishtwar, women sarpanches have been elected in all other 9 districts still their percentage is very low. From November 17 to December 11, 2018 there were panchayat election for 4483 sarpanch and 35029 punches post and 7806 women were elected to those positions making up 26.27% of the electorate. This was once more made feasible by the Panchayati raj amendment introduction of 33% reservation for women for the position of sarpanch. In addition to these, the first district development council election was held throughout the 280 DDC constituencies starting on November 28,2020 in 8parts and 110 seats were won by the People's Alliance for the Gupkar Declaration, while 75 seats were won by the BJP, which became the single-largest party. The Panchayati Raj laws were modified by the Jammu and Kashmir government in October 2020, adding provisions for Reservation for women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribe.

### **Participation of women in election process/ Panchayati raj institution**

Women equivalent engagement in decision making is not only demand of straightforward democracy but can also be seen as a required situation from women interest to be taken into account. Women play a kinetic role in political participation without the incorporation of women the purpose to achieve goal, equity, development is quite impossible. The first and incredibly small-scale enfranchisement of the people of Jammu and Kashmir occurred in 1934. Women who have passed the middle standard or an equivalent exam are only ones who are eligible to vote. The explanation for their limited scale is provided by the franchisor. 'The inclusion of women voters would raise the administrative problems of the election,' the commission said. However, with the installation of well-known government led by Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, the state election leading up to the 1951 constituent election were based on an inclusive establishment or universal franchise. Jammu and Kashmir section X of

the constitution governs the state's political system. Women in Jammu and Kashmir did not yet enter in that frame of mind before the political decision in 1972. In this political race for the first time most of the women contestant (4 out of 6) won. This political decision hence cleared way for the entrance of most noteworthy the rate 5.33% of women get together. Since then, the number of women in the assembly has never been more than 3%. From 1977 and 1983 decisions, the quantity of women contestant had continually expanded. Women of Jammu and Kashmir faced a lot of problem in last few years related to provision of the 73rd amendment and 74 amendments of Indian constitution. This amendment related to Panchayati Raj institution have brought about the silent revolution by the provision related to 33% reservations for women in the establishment in the neighborhood self- government. This participation of women in Panchayati Raj institution have brought a drastic change in India as well as grass root level politics is concerned. The panchayat election held in Jammu and Kashmir in 2002 falling a range of 23 years out of aggregate competitors Just 2.46% were women. As far as result concerned out of total 22,700 chosen Panches and sarpanches there are just 28 and 2 women respectively. But if we talk about 2011, the state of Jammu and Kashmir approved a law designating one third of the seat in Panchayati, the village level administrative bodies for women. There are five panchs in each panchayat, which is led by sarpanch. Although women were successful in obtaining one third of panch seats in 2011, but female sarpanches are still rare, according to government data. In Kashmir, just three women were elected to the 2125 sarpanch seats, whereas 25 women were elected to the 1956 seats... (Mohammad Iqbal Ganie, Sona Shukla, Barkatullah university Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, volume 9, issue4,2019).

## **CONCLUSION**

In the Panchayati raj institution women faced a numerous problem in election process. women members are having a lot of issues. Male members of the panchayat were not cooperative with the females. They believe women are meant for domestic work only. But with the passage of time, there was special privilege for women in Panchayati raj institution but reservation for women in these organizations would not help them unless or until they learn to be outspoken for their rights. women are smashing the ices in politics all across the world yet their voices are still routinely ignored and their contribution are sometimes undervalued. In many aspects women are still considered as unable to assume leadership role in field including Banking, economic development, weather forecasting, trading etc., that were seen being dominated by men. However, this is also true that in many aspects women are always discriminated. In case of Jammu and Kashmir, Panchayat's role are very significant in order to empower women.

Panchayats are local self-government institutions in India that are responsible for governing rural areas. Panchayats have played a significant role in advancing women's empowerment throughout the nation. In India, panchayats have aided women's empowerment in various ways such as reserving seats for females. Panchayats has made it possible for women to participate in decision-making and fill leadership positions. Similar to these women-centric policies, Panchayats have played a significant role in putting into practise numerous policies and initiatives that are expressly geared towards the advancement of women, such as through

offering access to healthcare, education, and employment possibilities. SHGs for women are the main consideration in this regard.

Panchayats have been working closely with women's SHGs to provide them with financial assistance, training, and marketing support. This has enabled women to become financially independent and contribute to their families' income. Panchayats have been conducting gender sensitization programs for their members and the wider community. This has helped in changing attitudes towards women and reducing gender-based discrimination. Panchayats have been encouraging women to take up leadership roles and lead initiatives such as water conservation, sanitation, and other community development projects. Panchayats have been playing a crucial role in promoting women's empowerment in India. However, there is still a long way to go in terms of ensuring that women have equal access to opportunities and are able to participate fully in the decision-making process. Women's SHGs have been closely collaborating with panchayats to offer them financial support, training, and marketing assistance. This has made it possible for women to support their families financially and become financially independent. Programmes to raise gender awareness have been run by panchayats for both their own residents and the general public. This has assisted in modifying attitudes towards women and reduced discrimination based on gender. Women are being encouraged by panchayats to assume leadership positions and oversee programmes like water conservation, sanitation, and other community development activities. In India, panchayats have been instrumental in advancing women's emancipation. To ensure that women have equal access to opportunities and can fully participate in the decision-making process, there is still a long way to go.

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