

Research Article**Addressing the training needs in enhancing the Participation of women elected members in Panchayat Raj Institutions - key issues****Dr. Parthesha K.V.**Associate Professor, Dept of Political Science, Govt Arts, Commerce & PG College (Autonomous),
Hassan, Karnataka.**Corresponding Author: Dr. Parthesha K.V.****Abstract**

This paper discusses the challenges relating to enhancing participation of women elected representatives (WERs) in Panchayat raj Institutions (PRIs) and focuses on addressing the training needs of women in containing proxy practices. The empowerment of women in governance is a critical aspect of achieving inclusive development and strengthening democracy at the grassroots level. Panchayat raj Institutions (PRIs) established with 33- 50% reservation for women aimed to bring marginalized voices into effective local governance. However, women elected members have been cornered in PRIs hindered by prevalence of patriarchal patterns, limited enforcement of legal safeguards and socio cultural barriers . Many WERs lack prior experiences in governance and administrative decision making and often become dependent on male relatives for administrative tasks, financial management and following up infrastructure projects. It is observed that male relatives particularly husbands wield higher authority in place of elected WERs. While some men really assist their wives with good intentions and cover up the administrative decision making gaps. But , proxy practices have crept in undermining the very purpose of political reservations for women. Recognising the immediate need for addressing this issue Union Ministry of Panchayat Raj has launched several initiatives to curb proxy leadership and enhance the capacity of WERs in PRIs including schemes like the **Sashakth Panchayat Netri Abhiyan** provides training and capacity building awareness to WERs. The use of community radio has been launched to create awareness. Digital technology tools have been used to create awareness. But enhancing leadership skills and decision making abilities of WERs providing structured training on governance, budgeting , financial and digital literacy , conflict management and community empowerment will virtually equip WERs. The training will also support WERs.

Keywords: women elected members, Panchayat Raj Institutions, the training needs, key issues.**Introduction:**

India has 15 lakh WERs which constitute approximately 46.6 % of the total elected representatives in PRIs . Additionally 21 states and 2 union territories have expanded this constitutional provision and extended reservation for women to the extent of 50% . But prevalence of patriarchal patterns, limited enforcement of legal safeguards and socio cultural barriers have hindered women effective participation . Even their leadership roles have become limited Rural local bodies like gram panchayats have women elected representatives, but their voice is feebly heard. The **Report of the Advisory Committee** in October 2023 tried to examine the issues and address the challengers hindering enhanced women participation This report closely reviewed the issues relating to women and recommended certain strategies. But

still women in PRIs are not as strong as their counterparts in administrative and political leadership roles.

Women representation is very low as compared to statistics of other countries across the world. The percentage is as low as women representation in Lok Sabha is 15.2 , Rajya Sabha is 13 , while in state assemblies it is 9.4 %.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act Of 1992

The 73rd constitutional amendment Act of 1992 marked a historic step in India's democratic decentralization by institutionalizing Panchayat raj institutions . This Act mandated 33% reservation for women in Gram Panchayats and Zilla Parishads. Several states in India have increased the reservation to 50% for women. PRIs have been assigned nearly 30 rural development activities ranging from poverty alleviation to improving health and family welfare. But women participatory involvements in these activities have been very meagre. Women elected members have failed to address larger issues such as rural livelihood, rural migration, rural elderly people issues, etc. Women have failed to talk about key rural issues such as rural animal husbandry , dairying ,poultry, fisheries ,social forestry , farm forestry, sericulture ,minor forest produce marketing, fuel fodder collection etc. during Panchayat meetings . These topics need greater debated involvement of the WERs as majority of the rural women find employment in these segments and they have the first-hand knowledge about the pros and cons of this segment's working.

Suggesting Measures for Elimination of Proxy Practices

WERs participation in PRIs working is often a much debated topic. It is known that women have failed to take leadership roles in PRIs . The need for suggesting measures for elimination of proxy practices and ensuring good governance including effective implementation of the clauses under Article 243 of the Constitution of India which were inserted in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 to increase women's representation in the grass root democratic institutions like Grama Panchayats is considered desirable. A need for suggesting a permanent legal framework to overcome the proxy practices is being discussed. In several rural Panchayats where women have been elected as Head of the Panchayat for namesake and their male family members are handling the procedural activities has drawn the attention of the government.

Other Factors hindering women's participation in Panchayats working -

1. Community and cultural limitations
2. Gender based discrimination
3. Lack or inadequate experience of political leadership
4. limited opportunities towards capacity building
5. Patriarchal societal norms
6. Political interference
7. Pressure balancing work life and family responsibilities
8. Socio economic restrictions

The need for training and capacity building of WERs - It is conjectured that due to inherited socio - cultural reasons , combined with lack of education , lack of experience and subsidiary roles assigned in families', women are showing hesitancy and diffidence to take political and financial decisions independently. Government sensing the need for filling this gap , decided to provide structural training for rural elected women about their roles and responsibilities in political procedures. These Training sessions aimed to rebuild women's perspectives on gender, political knowledge , making WERs understand the core principles embedded in Indian Constitution, the procedural working of the government , scope of the executive, comprehending legislative rules etc. A deeper knowledge about the technical issues attached with financial budgeting , approval process of rural development projects , and ability to

facilitate resource mapping efforts to use it for rural planning can be achieved through a vastly intended and structured training. Encouraging WERs participation through capacity building training will support in mainstreaming gender perspectives into the planning and budgeting procedural exercises. Such training will support in strengthening the **Reporting and Redressal mechanism**. Enhancement efforts both through the government and through public private partnerships built for undertaking capacity building training A system of reporting proxy leadership needs to be initiated in all Grama Panchayats uniformly

Role of Civil society organizations

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a critical role in addressing issues of women leadership and women political participation in PRIs as they can initiate context based initiatives in addressing local issues in gender advocacy, capacity building, monitoring, community engagement and research. CSOs can establish **Gender Resource Centre** to support and empower women by providing and guidance.

Strengthening the public address system

Strengthening the **Public Address System** which can become an effective tool in spreading awareness among the WERs at community level. Various women centric government schemes Women leadership forums can be established to create platforms or groups for women to discuss issues faced by them in local governance and share their experiences and also advocate for their rights collectively. The patriarchal dominance is so evident that women elected representative in Grama Sabha wishfully take a back seat and voluntarily allow their men to handle the situation. This is the root cause for proxy practices.

Women participation

Women participation in PRIs matter because their integrated involvement in Grama Panchayat can effectively support in alleviating rural poverty through government sponsored self-employment schemes. This will support rural communities to strengthen their livelihood, and the rural households can earn a decent livelihood through guaranteed wage employment. They can involve in creating a qualitative and durable rural infrastructure within the time schedule paving way for meeting the requirements of the rural beneficiaries. An effectual involvement of the WERs will also support in improving the working capacity of the other elected representatives and executives of the PRIs.

The WERs complete participation will support in developing vibrant village communities which are not only sustainable but also integrated with rural development. The creation of awareness about rural energy, solar energy dissemination, removing the barriers in the development of basic amenities, improving rural sanitation support in bringing transparency in rural administration. Women can reflect the inherent competence to reach out to community needs by addressing these core areas. WERs can educate rural communities about the importance of Independent women leadership and to raise awareness about the legal and administrative consequences of proxy leadership and to promote government schemes and digital governance initiatives such as **SVAMITVA** survey of villages and mapping with improved technology for digital mapping of villages **E Gram Swaraj Meri Panchayat Nirnaya** are online portals for transparent decision-making audit online a digital platform for financial accountability of local governance.

Conclusion:

Thus, the outcome of a traditional society has made women socially vulnerable. The rural India reflects these patriarchal practices where patriarchal decisions still dominate. But the WER's participation in democracy is very decisive hence strict legal and administrative measures against proxy leadership through enforcing penalties for proven cases of proxy governance. But the need to strengthen the monitoring mechanisms in preventing male relatives' from unlawfully exercising authority can be effectively. Besides, continuous capacity

building training is needed to develop vibrant village communities which are sustainable and integrated with rural development.

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