

# Knowledge and involvement of elected women in various activities of Gram Panchayat

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**Abstract -** The study was conducted in two districts of Haryana state having highest and lowest female literacy status i.e. Panchkula and Mewat, respectively. Majority of respondents were of middle age, illiterate and primary school educated, married, belonging to backward class, joint family, farming, medium income group and low to medium mass media exposure. About 80% of them were interested to know more about PRI, their roles and responsibilities and preferred village as venue of training. Majority of the respondents were having full knowledge and involvement in social activities, educational and political. It is suggested that the women should also be encouraged to organize themselves. It can be effectively used as instruments to mobilize women of the village. Some successful women's organizations can also act as catalytic agents for encouraging women's participation in social and political activities. The Government should provide financial support and infrastructure to some of the successful women organizations to take up the responsibility of encouraging the women elected representatives. This task could also be taken up by the leaders of women's movement in the state. They can also provide support to sensitize the rural women.

**Keywords:** PRI, Gram Panchayat, Women leaders, Women participation, Women empowerment

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since the enactment of the Haryana Gram Panchayat Act 1994, although the percentage of women at various levels of political activity has risen considerably yet they are still under-represented in governance and decision making positions. With the participation of women in PRIs, impersonal relations within families have changed for the better and political process heightened women's perceptions of their own capabilities. Almost two decades are over which is sufficient period to judge the significance of women's participation in PRIs. The efficient functioning and desired goals of PRI are not possible without active participation of women representatives in different development activities and decision making process. Hence, it is the need of the hour to examine the actual involvement of women representatives in PRIs despite the constraints like illiteracy, lack of experience, family responsibilities, restrictive social norms, lack of enabling environment and violence.

## II. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The present study was conducted in Haryana state. Two districts of Haryana state were selected purposively on the basis of female literacy status. Panchkula district having the highest female literacy status and Mewat the lowest female literacy status were selected for the study. Further, one blocks from each of the sample districts namely Barwala block from Panchkula district and Nuh block from Mewat district were selected purposively for the convenience, easy accessibility and familiarity of the researcher with the area. Adopting random sampling techniques villages from each sample block were selected. Ultimate stage of sampling constituted the selection of respondents which in the present study were women sarpanches and Panches (Panchayat members). Since the number of such respondents in each of the sample villages was very small (4-6 depending on size of Panchyat), all the members from each village were taken into sample. Thus the ultimate sample taken was of 160 respondents consisting of 80 respondents from each district. Primary and secondary information were gathered from various

sources for drawing inferences of the study. The secondary data was collected from the proceedings of GPs registers. A structured interview schedule was developed to collect primary data using personal interview technique. Several independent variables such as age, sex, caste, education, political participation, panchayats' type, and literacy zone were selected for the purpose of the study. The data so collected were coded, tabulated and suitably analyzed by calculating percentages, averages and chi-square to draw meaningful inferences.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Contextual matrix of the respondents

The maximum numbers of the respondents (52.50%) were from middle age group followed by 35.00% from old age group and the remaining 12.50% respondents were from young age group. One third of the respondents (34.38%) were illiterate and nearly the same proportion (31.88%) were educated upto primary level while only 7.50% were educated upto graduation level. Overwhelming majority of the respondents (90.63%) were married. Rest 8.75% and 0.63% were widow and divorcee, respectively. Majority of the respondents (63.75%) hailed from joint family while 36.25% of them were from nuclear family. Most of the respondents (55.63%) had annual income between Rs. 27001/- to 150000/- followed by 31.25% having income above Rs. 150000/- and 13.13% were from lower income group i.e less than Rs.27000/-. Nearly half of the respondents (49.38%) had farming as occupation followed by agri & skilled labour (30.00%). Majority of the respondents (36.87%) had low level of exposure to mass-media while 33.76% had high level of exposure. one third of the respondents (35.62%) were landless followed by 27.22% having small landholding and 21.26% were having large sized land holdings.

#### IV. KNOWLEDGE AND PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYAT ACTIVITIES

Haryana has enacted the Haryana Panchayati Raj Act 1994 in order to structure and strengthen the PRIs. It enables the members of PRIs to participate in development activities and decision making process. Act provides for the constitution of Gram Panchayats, its meetings, quorum, functions and duties. It also provides the constitutions of sub committees and local committees to undertake various activities at village level. Now about two decades have passed when the new Panchayati Raj Act 1994 was came into existence and it is pertinent to study the knowledge and participation level of Panchayat members to make it more functional and fruitful. The knowledge level of elected Panchayat members about various activities of Gram Panchayat and their involvement and work satisfaction are presented.

#### V. ADMINISTRATIVE AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES:

Administrative and economic aspect is the backbone of Gram Panchayat as no development is possible in the absence of sufficient fund and its proper utilization. All members of Gram Panchayat must be aware of the availability of fund with Gram Panchayat and priorities of village development. Eighty five percent of the respondents had the full knowledge that preparation of annual plan for village development was a Panchayat activity but their direct involvement in this activity was low (39.71%) and 18.52% of these were not satisfied with their working (Table 1). About three fourth respondents were having the knowledge of development programmes like MNAREGA where as 27.50% women members were having partial knowledge about assistance given to villagers in seeking loan, credit, etc. However, more than 90 percent of the respondents having full knowledge about these two activities also involved directly and majority of them were satisfied with their involvement.

It was surprising to note that 33.13% of the elected women members were not knowing that preparation of Panchayat budget was a Gram Panchayat activity and 50.63% were having partial knowledge about it. 57.69% of those having full knowledge (16.25%) were involved in budget preparation and only 60% of them were satisfied with their involvement. Similarly only 25.63% members had the full knowledge that income-expenditure accountability of Panchayat fund was a G.P. activity and 75.61% of them were involved in this activity. Discussion on expenditure of school, anganwadi, etc. and right of women in parental property as Panchayat activities was fully known to 81.25% and 66.25% elected members of Panchayat, respectively. Those having full knowledge of these two activities also participated (90%) but work satisfaction was low (38.61%) as regards to right of women in parental property.

Table 1. Knowledge and involvement in administrative and economic activities of G.P.

Sr No.	Activities	Knowledge	Knowledge	Rank	Categories	Involvement	Work Satisfaction
			Frequency N=160			Frequency N=160	Frequency N=160
1	Preparation of annual plan for village development	Full Knowledge	136 (85.00)	I	Yes	54 (39.71)	44 (81.48)
		Partial	15 (9.38)		No	82 (60.29)	10 (18.52)
		No Knowledge	9 (5.63)				
2	Assistance in seeking employment in Govt Dev Prog. Like NAREGA	Full Knowledge	118 (73.75)	III	Yes	107 (90.68)	96 (89.72)
		Partial	35 (21.88)		No	11 (9.32)	11 (10.28)
		No Knowledge	7 (4.38)				
3	Assistance in procuring economic assistance like loan, credit etc to villagers	Full Knowledge	89 (55.63)	VI	Yes	83 (93.26)	61 (73.49)
		Partial	44 (27.50)		No	6 (6.74)	22 (26.51)
		No Knowledge	27 (16.88)				
4	Preparing Panchayat Budget	Full Knowledge	26 (16.25)	VII	Yes	15 (57.69)	9 (60.00)
		Partial	81 (50.63)		No	11 (42.31)	6 (40.00)
		No Knowledge	53 (33.13)				
5	Accountability of Panchayat income and expenditure	Full Knowledge	41 (25.63)	IV	Yes	31 (75.61)	21 (67.74)
		Partial	108 (67.50)		No	10 (24.39)	10 (32.26)
		No Knowledge	11 (6.88)				
6	Discussion on expenditure of school, anganwadi etc.	Full Knowledge	130 (81.25)	II	Yes	120 (92.31)	103 (85.83)
		Partial	16 (10.00)		No	10 (7.69)	17 (14.17)
		No Knowledge	14 (8.75)				
7	Right of women in parental property	Full Knowledge	106 (66.25)	V	Yes	101 (95.28)	39 (38.61)
		Partial	37 (23.13)		No	5 (4.72)	62 (61.39)
		No Knowledge	17 (10.63)				

Figures in the parenthesis denote percentage

It was inferred from the Table-1 that the elected members were not fully known to different administrative and economic activities of Gram Panchayat as their percent was as low as 16.25% in some activities and maximum percent of members having full knowledge was 85.0%. The knowledge about preparation of annual plan for village development as Panchayat activity was ranked first followed by knowledge of expenditure on school, anganwadi, etc. The knowledge level of elected members pointed towards the fact that more efforts are needed to make elected

members aware of various activities of Gram Panchayat for their efficient functioning. The results indicated that some of elected women representatives have used their office not only to main stream, gender issues but also to address the development needs of village community as a whole. Panda (1996) and Singh (2004) have also reported that due to constitutional amendment, women have played more participatory role in Panchayat activities.

#### VI. SOCIAL ACTIVITIES:

It is interesting to note that majority of women were having knowledge about social activities like eradication of dowry system, reduction of violence as beating/abusing, and specifically eradication of female foeticide (Table 2).

Table 2. Knowledge and involvement in social aspect of G.P.

Sr No.	Activities	Categories	Knowledge	Rank	Categories	Involvement	Work Satisfaction
			Frequency N=160			Frequency N=160	Frequency N=160
1	Elimination Parda System	Full knowledge	118 (73.75)	VI	Yes	112 (94.92)	84 (75.00)
		Partial	10 (6.25)		No	6 (5.08)	28 (25.00)
		No knowledge	32 (20.00)				
2	Eradication of Dowry System	Full knowledge	152 (95.00)	I	Yes	138 (90.79)	109 (78.09)
		Partial	3 (1.88)		No	14 (9.21)	29 (21.01)
		No knowledge	5 (3.13)				
3	Eradication of female illiteracy	Full knowledge	120 (75.00)	V	Yes	107 (89.17)	90 (84.11)
		Partial	21 (13.13)		No	13 (10.83)	17 (15.89)
		No knowledge	19 (11.88)				
4	Eradication of female foeticide	Full knowledge	128 (80.00)	III	Yes	123 (96.09)	109 (88.62)
		Partial	16 (10.00)		No	5 (3.91)	14 (11.38)
		No knowledge	16 (10.00)				
5	Reduction of violence as beating/abusing women	Full knowledge	149 (93.13)	II	Yes	143 (95.97)	136 (95.10)
		Partial	5 (3.13)		No	6 (4.03)	7 (4.90)
		No knowledge	6 (3.75)				
6	Social welfare programs for handicaps, mentally retarded, old age and widows.	Full knowledge	89 (55.63)	III	Yes	84 (94.38)	77 (91.67)
		Partial	51 (31.88)		No	5 (5.62)	7 (8.33)
		No knowledge	20 (12.50)				
7	Eradication of discrimination	Full knowledge	122 (76.25)	IV	Yes	117 (95.90)	111 (97.87)
		Partial	23 (14.38)		No	5 (4.10)	6 (5.13)

	against girl child	No knowledge	15 (9.38)				
8	To celebrate festivals/fairs at community levels.	Full knowledge	128 (80.00)	III	Yes	125 (97.66)	121 (96.80)
		Partial	22 (13.75)		No	3 (2.34)	4 (3.20)
		No knowledge	10 (6.25)				

Figures in the parenthesis denote percentage

Overwhelming majority of respondents (95.01%) had full knowledge that eradication of dowry system was a Panchayat activity and were directly involved in this activity (90.79%) and 78.09% were satisfied with their working. Reduction of violence as beating/abusing women was known to overwhelming majority (93.13%) and were directly involved in this activity (95.97%) and also satisfied with working of this activity (95.10%). Three fourth percent of respondents had full knowledge that eradication of female foeticide is a Panchayat activity and their direct involvement in this activity was very high (96.09%) and 84.17% were satisfied with their working. Maximum numbers of number of women (80%) were having full knowledge that celebration of festivals and fairs is a Panchayat activity and 97.66% were involved in this activity and also satisfied (96.80%). Nearly three fourth respondents were having full knowledge about elimination of Parda system and eradication of discrimination against girl child being a Panchayat activity. More than 90 percent were directly involved in these two activities and were satisfied with their working. Respondents were having partial knowledge about social welfare programmes (31.88%) for handicaps, mentally retarded, aged and widow, but those having full knowledge (55.63%) were directly involved (94.38%) and satisfied with their working (91.67%).

It is inferred from the table that elected women were fully known to different social activities and overwhelming majority of them were involved in participation of these activities and were satisfied with their working. It may be due to the fact that women are facing social challenges in day to day life and they were well acquainted with these type of activities and are more sociable. Devi (1995) and Prasad and Heranath (2004) also reported that women have proved better leaders than their counter parts in PRIs inspite of many social and cultural limitations. Chandra (1997) noted that active participation in social, economic and political sphere would help in enhancing of decision making and empowerment.

#### VII. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES:

Women participation in political activities virtually began from PRI. It is argued that participation of women is important to voice their needs and implement ideas of this fraction of society in development. Reservation provided by Government had forced women to contest election and participate in decision making in local bodies (Pai, 1998). It was encouraging to note that overwhelming majority of women was having knowledge about political Panchayat activities (Table 3). The respondents were having full knowledge about making Panchayat system transparent (92.50%), encouraging community participation for rural development and awakening community members regarding voting rights (90.63% each), to expose corrupt official (80.63%) and encouraging rural women to participate in Panchayat or development affairs (74.38%) and were ranked accordingly. To expose corrupt official as Panchayat activity was ranked 1st followed by encouraging community participation for rural development and awakening community members regarding voting right.

Regarding their involvement in political activities overwhelming majority of them were involved and satisfied with their working where as in making panchayat system transparent, only 72.3% were involving themselves and 27.7% were not involving themselves just to avoid any problem to them. They were having some fear in mind that if they make transparency they might be caught in some furious activities because of their less awareness and knowledge about PRIs.

Table 3. Knowledge and involvement in political activities of G.P.

Sr No.	Variables	Categories	Knowledge		Rank	Category	Involvement		Work Satisfaction	
			Freq. N=160	(%)			Freq. N=160	(%)	Freq. N=160	(%)
1	Encouraging rural women to participate in panchayat or dev. Affairs	Full Knowledge	119	74.38	IV	Yes	117	98.32	107	91.45
		Partial	32	20.00		No	2	1.68	10	8.55
		No Knowledge	9	5.63						
2	Awakening community members regarding voting right	Full Knowledge	145	90.63	II	Yes	140	96.55	135	96.43
		Partial	9	5.63		No	5	3.45	5	3.57
		No Knowledge	6	3.75						
3	To expose corrupt officials	Full Knowledge	129	80.63	III	Yes	127	98.45	105	82.68
		Partial	20	12.50		No	2	1.55	22	17.32
		No Knowledge	11	6.88						
4	Make Pnachayat system transparent	Full Knowledge	148	92.50	I	Yes	107	72.30	94	87.85
		Partial	6	3.75		No	41	27.70	13	12.15
		No Knowledge	6	3.75						
5	Encouraging community participation for rural development	Full Knowledge	145	90.63	II	Yes	123	84.83	110	89.43
		Partial	11	6.88		No	22	15.17	13	10.57
		No Knowledge	4	2.50						

It is concluded from the table that majority of respondents were having knowledge about political activity and they were involved and satisfied with their working due to 73rd constitution amendment. The role of village leader is of great importance for successful implementations of any development programme. Hence, women can motivate people to take advantage of Panchayat activities and use of services of a particular programme. Rao (1996) found that women have received a preferential consideration and that too in political representation and that again in local governments. Lal (2005) noted that almost all women pradhan agreed that granting reservation and thus paving way for political participation in rural local bodies is a praiseworthy step but 80% pradhan held the view that employment and asset generation will prove better and effective for their empowerment. Dayanidhi (2010) found that women participation in political activities virtually began from PRI, so that their ideas and need come forward in development of society.

#### VIII. EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES:

In this part, knowledge and involvement of Panchayat member in educational activity of Gram Panchayat has been discussed. The analysis of results presented in table 4 indicated that 84.38 percent respondents were having

full knowledge that education of children of weaker section is a Panchayat activity and this statement was ranked as first in knowledge score.

Table 4. Knowledge and involvement in educational activities of G.P.

Sr No.	Variables	Categories	Knowledge			Rank	Category	Involvement		Work Satisfaction	
			Freq. N=160	(%)				Freq. N=160	(%)	Freq. N=160	(%)
1	Literacy Programs	Full knowledge	94	58.75	III	Yes	77	81.91	68	88.31	
		Partial	56	35.00		No	17	18.09	9	11.69	
		No knowledge	10	6.25							
2	Education of children of weaker section	Full knowledge	135	84.38	I	Yes	124	91.85	109	87.90	
		Partial	13	8.13		No	11	8.15	15	12.10	
		No knowledge	12	7.50							
3	Pre-school and primary school education	Full knowledge	116	72.50	II	Yes	107	92.24	98	91.59	
		Partial	27	16.88		No	9	7.76	9	8.41	
		No knowledge	17	10.63							
4	Manage night school and non formal education	Full knowledge	47	29.38	VII	Yes	43	91.49	39	90.70	
		Partial	77	48.13		No	4	8.51	4	9.30	
		No knowledge	36	22.50							
5	Organising sports/cultural shows	Full knowledge	78	48.75	IV	Yes	58	74.36	53	91.38	
		Partial	43	26.88		No	20	25.64	5	8.62	
		No knowledge	39	24.38							
6	To participate in enrollment drive	Full knowledge	53	33.13	VI	Yes	50	94.34	48	96.00	
		Partial	67	41.88		No	3	5.66	2	4.00	
		No knowledge	40	25.00							
7	Village library and reading rooms	Full knowledge	71	44.38	VI	Yes	56	78.87	43	76.79	
		Partial	48	30.00		No	15	21.13	13	23.21	
		No knowledge	41	25.63							

Out of these, overwhelming majority (91.85%) was directly involved in this activity and were satisfied with their involvement (87.90%). About three fourth percent of respondents were having full knowledge of preschool and primary school education as their activity, (92.24%) were directly involved with this act and were getting satisfaction from its working (91.59%). It is surprising to note that 48.13 percent were having partial knowledge of non formal education and night school. This might be due to their ignorance less education and other socio-cultural factors. More than half of the respondents (58.75%) knew fully about literacy programme for children, 35 percent were having partial knowledge about this programme. Out of these 81.91 percent were involved in this activity and were satisfied with their workings (88.31%). It is very sad to note that about one fourth of elected representative were having no knowledge about village library and reading rooms (25.63%), participate in enrollment drive (25.01%), organizing cultural/sports shows (24.38%) and manage night school and non-formal education for women (22.50%). Naidu and Reddy (1997) concluded that Panchayat are taking interest regarding educational activities, yet their performance is not satisfactory.

Thus we can conclude that there is improvement in education of children of weaker sections and preschool and primary school education activity, yet there is need to give attention toward women educational development as it is very important factor in family and village development. Indian institute of social services (2000) in Haryana has reviewed the progress of elected women and found that majority were illiterate, but after two years in office, they demanded literacy skills and felt need of educations for their daughters. Rao (2009) noticed that lack of knowledge on procedures of Panchayat, traditional system, presence of male members restricted the objective participation of women in discussions and even decision making.

#### IX. AGRICULTURE AND VILLAGE INDUSTRY:

Data in table 5 presents the knowledge, involvement and work satisfaction regarding agriculture and village industry activities. The analysis of data reveals that 80.63 percent respondents had full knowledge about settling land disputes as Panchayat activity. Out of these 92.75 percent were involving themselves and were satisfied with their working. This activity statement got the first rank in knowledge score followed by serving as liaison between villagers and agriculture extension officer (II) and securing seeds, fertilizers, implements, pesticides etc. (III), respectively. About half of the respondents (49.38%) were having partial knowledge of providing bank credit to farmers as Panchayat activity but those having full knowledge about this activity (34.38%) were involving themselves in this activity (81.82%) and also satisfied with their working (77.78%). About two third majority of the respondents were having full knowledge that serving as liaison between villagers and agricultural extension officers is a Panchayat activity. They were directly involving themselves (94.39%) and were satisfied with their work performance (96.04%). About half of respondents were having knowledge of promotion of rural and cottage industry as an activity. Out of these only 58.44% were getting involved in this activity and were satisfied with their involvement (88.89%). The respondents having no knowledge of agreement for irrigation (26.88%) as Panchayat activity was highest among all the seven activity statement regarding agriculture and village industry.

Table 5. Knowledge and involvement in agriculture and village industry activities of G.P.

SR NO.	Variables	Categories	Knowledge			Category	Involvement		Work Satisfaction	
			Freq. N=160	(%)	Rank		Freq. N=160	(%)	Freq. N=160	(%)
1	Agreement for irrigation	Full Knowledge	85	53.13	IV	Yes	81	95.29	73	90.12
		Partial	32	20.00		No	4	4.71	8	9.88
		No Knowledge	43	26.88						
2	Setting land dispute	Full Knowledge	129	80.63	I	Yes	119	92.25	100	84.03
		Partial	17	10.63		No	10	7.75	19	15.97

		No Knowledge	14	8.75						
3	Providing bank credit to farmers	Full Knowledge	55	34.38	VII	Yes	45	81.82	35	77.78
		Partial	79	49.38		No	10	18.18	10	22.22
		No Knowledge	26	16.25						
4	Extension training regarding agri. Practices	Full Knowledge	62	38.75	VI	Yes	53	85.48	51	96.23
		Partial	69	43.13		No	9	14.52	2	3.77
		No Knowledge	29	18.13						
5	Securing seeds, fertilizers, agri. Implementations, pesticides etc.	Full Knowledge	93	58.13	III	Yes	76	81.72	71	93.42
		Partial	38	23.75		No	17	18.28	5	6.58
		No Knowledge	29	18.13						
6	Serving as liaison between villagers and Agri. Ext. officers	Full Knowledge	107	66.88	II	Yes	101	94.39	97	96.04
		Partial	38	23.75		No	6	5.61	4	3.96
		No Knowledge	15	9.38						
7	promotion of rural and cottage industry	Full Knowledge	77	48.13	V	Yes	45	58.44	40	88.89
		Partial	57	35.63		No	32	41.56	5	11.11
		No Knowledge	26	16.25						

It is inferred from the finding that more than half of the respondent were having partial or no knowledge about providing bank credit to farmers, extension training regarding agriculture practices and promotion of rural and cottage industry. Kaur and Singh (1993), Devi (2006) and Nanda (2006) also noted that women participation in various agricultural and other activities remain insignificant. Although efforts are being made regarding agricultural activities yet more is required to be done for agricultural and village industry activities.

#### X. CONCLUSION

It was concluded that some of elected women representatives have used their office not only to main stream, gender issues but also to address the development needs of village community as a whole. Elected women were fully known to different social activities and overwhelming majority of them were involved in participation of these activities and were satisfied with their working. It may be due to the fact that women are facing social challenges in day to day life and they were well acquainted with these types of activities and are more sociable. Majority of respondents were having knowledge about political activity and they were involved and satisfied with their working due to 73rd constitution amendment. There is improvement in education of children of weaker sections and preschool and primary school education activity, yet there is need to give attention toward women educational development as it is very important factor in family and village development. Indian institute of social services

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