

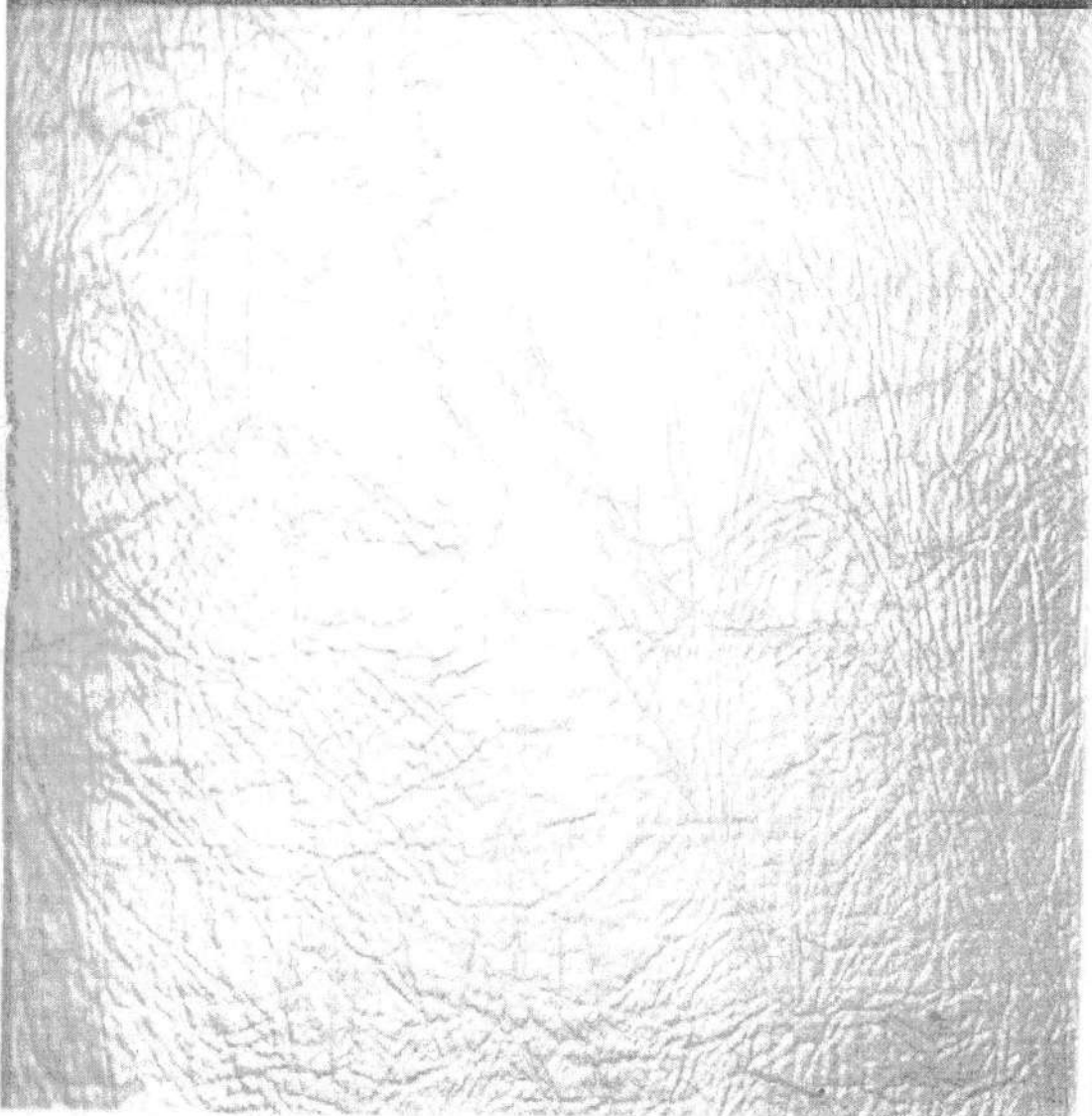
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**A Study of Change in Women's Participation in Gram Panchayats of Nashik District**

Prof. D.S. Godage

Dept. of Political Science

Research Scholar, J.J.T. University, Rajasthan, India

**Abstract**

In India, 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment provides 33% reservation for women in the rural and urban Local Self Governing Bodies. However some practical difficulties have been experienced at the field level. For e.g. a particular Grampanchayat has 9-member body. According to 33% reservation for women, there will be 6 men and 3 women in this body. Therefore while taking decisions or passing a resolution, the men have the majority. This amounts to disregard and rejection of most of the resolutions tabled by the women members. If women try opposing such tactics of the male members, they are pressurized to keep their mouth shut. Women are forced to maintain silence since the men have numerical majority in most of the Grampanchayats. Gradually women start withdrawing from the Grampanchayat proceedings. Same is the scenario at different levels in the government, where women officials are less in numbers. Dominating attitude of the male officials often obstruct the smooth functioning of the women officials.

**Keywords :** Self Governing Bodies, Gram Panchayats, Local authority.

**Introduction**

According to the recommendations of Balwantraj Mehta Committee Report submitted to the Government of India, State Government of Maharashtra appointed a Committee under the Chairmanship of Vasant Naik on June 27, 1960 to consider the issue of setting up of Panchayat Raj in Maharashtra. This committee made 226 recommendations. Accordingly, The Maharashtra Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samities Act, 1961 was passed. The Committee suggested that the three tier structure as suggested by Mehta Committee be accepted in which Zilla Parishad is to be supreme authority. (Widge, M.K., 1993) The persons working on these institutions were to be directly elected. Administration of Zilla Parishads should not be assigned to the District Collector but an equivalent cadre of Chief Executive officer of the Zilla Parishad need be created who shall be solely responsible for functioning of Panchayat Raj Institutions in the District. The Committee also made detailed recommendations on structure, functions, local finance corporation. For the issues of democratic decentralization and policy matters relating to local self bodies in the State and such other important issues that may arise, a sub-committee of Ministers may be appointed to take immediate decisions. (Prabhavathi, V., 1991)

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**Local Self-Government Institutions In Maharashtra**

Maharashtra is the second largest state in India both in terms of population and geographical area (3.08 Lakh sq. km.) The State has a population of 11.24 Crore (Census 2011) which is 9.3 per cent of the total population of India. The State is highly urbanized with 45.2 per cent people residing in urban areas. (Economic Survey of Maharashtra, 2012-13)

The State has 35 districts which are divided into six revenue divisions viz. Konkan, Pune, Nashik, Aurangabad, Amravati and Nagpur for administrative purposes. The State has a long tradition of having statutory bodies for planning at the district level. For local self-governance in rural areas, there are 33 Zilla Parishads, 351 Panchayat Samities and 27,906 Gram Panchayats. The urban areas are governed through 26 Municipal Corporations, 219 Municipal Councils, 7 Nagar Panchayats and 7 Cantonment Boards. (Srinivasa; S. 2000) Table 1.1 gives the details of rural local self-government Institutions in the State of Maharashtra.

**Local Self-Govt. Institutions in Nashik District**

Following Table shows Rural Local Self-government bodies operating in Rural Politics of Nashik District. Though all the three-tier bodies of Local Self-Government are shown in the Table, present study shall cover only the primary stage political participation of women in Gram Panchayats in the District. Only densely populated 5 out of 15 Talukas, giving a Sample Size of 33.3 per cent population will be investigated in this study. (Kathleen New land, 1995)

**Table : Local Self-Govt. Institutions in Nashik District**

Local Self-Govt. Institutions	1960-	1970-	1980-	1990-	2000-2011	2011-2012	(2012-13)
Zilla Parishads	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Panchayat Samities	13	13	13	13	15	15	15
Gram Panchayats	-	-	-	-	-	-	1373

Source: DSO Nashik, Bureau of Economics and Statistics Socio-economic Review of Nashik District.

N.B.: Data of ZP Level and Block Level only was readily available.

There are 1373 gram Panchayats in the district and a fraction of these gram Panchayats will be selected to investigate into the issue of participation of women members of Gram Panchayat in overall development of the village and of their own.

**Conclusions**

It is quite evident from the study that, Gram panchayats in many places have become highly politicized. Without political patronage it is difficult in a majority of cases for both women and men members of panchayats to get elected. This interference from political parties and their representatives has adversely affected these local bodies. An integrated approach is necessary to make the panchayats truly democratic and strengthen good governance. Training and research

institutions, concerned state and central departments have a role in strengthening the panchayat raj institutions.

Reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has definitely set a positive trend overall. Despite the many problems and limitations women have proved that given an opportunity they are capable of becoming equal partners in the development process. To an extent women have managed to overcome their lack of access and opportunities whether pertaining to literacy, skills, mobility etc. and yet perform their roles and responsibilities as members of panchayat raj institutions. While reservation has provided a window of opportunity for women to enter the public sphere, much needs to be done to empower women in the true sense. It is important to be aware of the socio-economic and political background of the women who are elected to panchayats.

Awareness and training programmes to a large extent have focused on general aspects relating to the functioning of panchayats. As seen from the study in a majority of cases the awareness levels of women on these aspects are quite encouraging. Women cannot function and play their roles effectively unless they are able to assert themselves.

Empowerment is a process and multi-dimensional. It cannot be confined to a limited sphere. Planned interventions have to be made in areas including the economic, social and political spheres for true empowerment to take place. Therefore, women have to be provided access and opportunities to the basic rights such as literacy, legal and ownership rights etc. Political empowerment can be better sustained if women have at least a degree of economic independence. The 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment and the reservation policy for women undoubtedly have set a positive trend. Women in large number have been able to create and occupy space in the public sphere. It has given them greater visibility as well as mobility. Women have also been able to enter other sectors and actively participate in local organizations.

This has changed the perception and outlook of women and given them greater self-confidence. Women have gained better status both in family and outside. Family members and men in many instances perceive women in a more positive way. In the context of gram panchayat, more reforms and structural changes are needed that would actually delegate powers and responsibilities to elected women members. Sensitisation of men, both officials and elected members is very essential for women to be able to function effectively. Sharing and co-operation by both men and women would result in better designing and implementation of activities for the benefit of all.

At the same time women need to gain greater role clarity and strike a balance between their household and official responsibilities. While men have to be sensitized to be supportive in this, women need to bring about shifts in their attitudes and outlook. Unless all these processes take place simultaneously and on a continuing basis empowerment of women in gram panchayats

*Shodhparv (शोधपर्व)*

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would remain a buzzword without translating into reality. There is a lot of scope and potential for women to emerge as leaders and decision makers and play a key role in the development and good governance of local institutions. It requires dedicated and committed efforts by all concerned.

#### Suggestions

In the light of the above study following specific suggestions can be made for the empowerment of women through their effective participation in political processes.

1. Men's hostility, indifferent attitude and domestic responsibilities are major constraints in empowerment of women. Therefore, political awareness programmes should make women understand their rights and the benefits.
2. There is the need for regular orientation and training programmes that will help to increase the political and management skills of women in panchayats. Being politically skillful, they will be able to understand and assimilate diverse political opinion, participate intelligently in political debates and analyse issues to make useful decisions.
3. A long-term solution to women's participation in political activities rests in greater awareness about their role, responsibilities and entitlements.
4. Participatory approaches need to be adopted.
5. Expansion of information, education and development of communication skills of women.
6. Empowerment as a process requires multi-dimensional efforts and holistic interventions. This requires concerted and sustained efforts by all concerned-policy makers, Governments, NGOs, Training Institutions and by the women and men themselves.
7. Sensitisation of men, both officials and elected members is very essential for women to be able to function effectively.
8. Sharing and co-operation by both women and men would result in better designing and implementation of activities in panchayats.
9. Women members have to be provided access to the basic rights such as literacy, legal and property rights etc.
10. Contribution by women members should be recognized and appreciated in public spheres.
11. Political empowerment of women need more support from officials and the public.
12. Gender discrimination should be minimized or avoided.
13. Reservation for women should be continued to ensure their empowerment through greater participation in political administration and decision making.
14. More reservation for women in Panchayats is suggested for the empowerment of women.

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*Shodhanu* (शोधपत्र)