

# CHALLENGES FACING DECENTRALIZED PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PANCHAYATS

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## Abstract

*The 73rd Constitutional amendment aims to provide the "organisations of self governance" known as panchayats the authority to manage local growth and development. The idea is not to consider panchayats as delivery systems for the state govt or local governing organisations. It implies that the country would have three tiers of governance: a central govt at the national scale, state govts at the state level, as well as a 3rd layer made up of panchayats somewhere at district, intermediate, and village stages. Each level of government would've had unique tasks, authority, commitments, and finances. Between the many levels, there will be collaboration and integration to ensure the system runs smoothly. Every layer would be aware of its function and how to carry it out.*

The gramme sabhas and village panchayats have the greatest position to start the planning processes from bottom since they are the closest to the people. On the basis of available resources and local demands, it may create plans at the local levels and then transmit them to the intermediate-level panchayat, that would then transmit their plans to the districts panchayat, the districts planning committee, and so forth. Plans will be combined at each progressively higher level. All of the panchayat plans that were sent to them would be combined by the panchayat raj at the intermediate level, and the same procedure would be followed at the districts level. This kind of decentralised planning is depicted by the development of the panchayat framework. Together, the two—the structure and the procedure—make up the same institutional framework for local self- govt. Without concurrent devolution of authority and decentralisation of management, the institutional framework of the panchayat raj structure is ineffective.

Women's participation was envisioned in this decentralised planning and development paradigm via a points system of exclusions in all three levels of the panchayats. The communities were another unique method for include elected women in decision-making. There were provisions for various

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## Introduction

committees, social justice subcommittee, and other minor organisations in several of the state panchayat statutes that dealt with specific tasks on behalf of such panchayat body. Women were represented on these committees. The Act as well as the Rules included requirements for women's participation in several states. So many them did not, however. Dalit women, for instance, had to participate in the race equality committee in certain states since it was these populations who were subjected to atrocities by the upper caste communities. Over most states, it was customary to have the elected females in the standing committees—or whichever name they were known by in each state—charged with the advancement of women and children. This has been done because it was believed that women were solely interested in these matters and there existed an unwitting association between women and these topics. There were other additional panchayat committees covering topics like infrastructure, production, and finance, however women were seldom appointed to them. (This was a kind of gender prejudice as well since it linked women having their biological sex.) Being a member of these committees gave women knowledge of the many programmes but also schemes being implemented in the specific industry, the operation of the govt agency, and the surveillance and coordinating procedures that must be set up if changes are to be realised.

Nevertheless, the reality differs greatly from the gram panchayat and decentralised planning and also development models. The panchayati raj's basic institutions are in place, and votes are conducted fairly often in the vast majority of states, but the real process of devolving authorities, responsibilities, including resources towards the panchayat raj has not yet begun in a thorough or full sense. In the majority of the states, activity is being done haphazardly and in pieces. The personnel and financial resources that

Panchayats need to carry out another tasks that are required of them under the Amendment Act of 1993 plus their respective state laws are still lacking. Some states have given panchayats the authority to do a certain tasks, but these are significantly less than what is outlined in the Constitution's 11th Schedule. Assets have not been shifted, even when functions have. The political and administrative elite seems to have an innate reluctance to putting off the process of decentralization and erecting obstacles to a seamless transition. Whatever the internal politics, as while the system doesn't really operate, elected officials, especially women members, feel increasingly frustrated and powerless. The elected officials find it very challenging to perform their responsibilities in a comprehensive and integrated way in such a circumstance. This is particularly true for women. The panchayats actually must operate in order for elected women to fully achieve their potential to contribute to national development via grassroots political engagement. Both women's personal interests and the interests of healthy self-govt are served by this. The panchayats as a whole should be considered when evaluating the interests of women. Both elected male and female should work to reestablish the panchayats' privileges and power. The nation is now in a serious predicament as a result of the panchayats' dysfunction.

#### **Gram sabha as the basic unit of governance**

In the gram panchayat framework, the gramme Sabha has a special place. The "spirit of panchayati raj" was used to characterise it. It presents a chance for representative democracy within its most representational configuration. But the performance fell short of what was anticipated. The 73rd Amendment included the addition of Article 243 to the Act. "A body comprising of individuals enrolled in the electoral registers related to a village included within the territory of Parishad at the village level," is

how the term "gramme Sabha" is defined in this statute. The gramme sabhas are the foundation or the fundamental unit of such panchayati raj institutions. But according to Art 243A of such Constitution, it is up to the various states to determine what authority and duties the gramme sabha shall have. In the regional panchayat laws, these duties and authority must be spelled out by the state legislatures. Despite the fact that there is no consistency across the state legislation regarding panchayats, several of them have certain commonalities. The gramme sabha is required to hold meetings on a regular basis. Depending on the act, it may happen twice per year or more often. Only when the required number of voters who are listed on the electoral registers are present may the gramme sabha convene. Or to put it another way, a quorum is necessary. This number must be present for the meeting to proceed; else, it must be postponed. According to the special regulations outlined in the parishad act for each state, the gramme sabha meetings are anticipated to generally evaluate the advancement of the implementation of the developmental projects and programs in the area by the gramme panchayats. It's disappointing to face reality. Gram Panchayat meetings occur significantly less often than required by law, while even when these are convened, the required quorum is seldom present. In a survey of gram sabhas across six states, it was discovered that the required minimum attendance was seldom met and also that records of gramme sabha sessions were female in Panchayati Raj fallaciously filled up even when the requisite quorums were not met. The explanation for this poor result was the electorate's lack of knowledge and feeling of disinterest. This laxity on the behalf of the locals further dissuades the pradhans from being interested in calling these gatherings. The term "gramme sabha meeting" was unfamiliar to many residents of the communities. This was the situation in almost every state: the

councils or the municipal government had no academic program to notify the village inhabitants of its significance, that it was a necessary component of a healthy panchayats, that it would enable the populace to keep a close eye on local govt, what the privileges of the populace were, etc.

Women's participation in the gramme sabhas was especially depressing. No specific quorum was established in the panchayat legislation or norms for women's attendance. As a result, not a single woman needed to be present for a meeting of the gramme sabha, especially with the current circumstance. It's not hard to see why the ladies are unable or reluctant to attend these village gatherings. This is a result of their dual and triple workload, as was mentioned previously. Secondly, Most women don't know or get accurate information regarding meetings since it is often only provided to males via mostly male messaging services. A feature that might help women participate more is the inclusion of a distinct quorum for women inside the overall quorum. One of the very few states with a particular clause mandating a women's majority is Madhya Pradesh. The schedule of the gramme sabha meeting is another issue that might arise while attending such gatherings. Men often choose the timeframe, since their free time may well not overlap with women's leisure time. Women put in more hours and find it challenging to operate a home office unless more advance preparation is done. When choosing the time, this is not taken into consideration.

Due to the poor track record of gramme sabha meetings occurring, several states took remedial action by establishing a certain day for the gatherings of all gramme sabhas inside the state. Haryana was among the states to take this action. The legislative assembly adopted a resolution stating that starting in 1999, the two required gramme sabha sessions will take place on the second and thirteenth of April of

each year. The majority requirement was also waived. The government representative was assigned the duty of presiding over meetings, organising the agenda, and ensuring that the consultations were conducted in line with the established procedures. The responsibility of alerting the community in advanced about the convention's date, time, location, etc. was also assumed by the local government. In other words, the gramme sabhas became activities under government control. Despite these sophisticated plans, there was no public reaction to the gatherings. A women's firm's report on the gramme sabha meetings in 8 Haryana villages finds that the locals found it extremely difficult to find time to spare since the government's chosen date for the meeting (April 13th) did not work at all for them. ' In several Northern Indian states, notably Haryana, the festival celebrated falls on this day; men and also women are both quite active at this period. Therefore, it does not appear proper that the statewide decision to select this date was made. Second, the majority of the locals were unaware of the purpose of a gramme sabha meeting and had no idea how to react when it was announced. Not just to did the women attend just a small percentage of the 8 sessions, but when they could, they did not actively participate in the conversations. Most people complied with the dress code according to the customs of the area (veils covers the entire face). They were careful not to be seen by the guys and to prevent the men from looking at or being able to see their faces. The villagers objected to the dates which that govt had picked for the gramme sabha sessions throughout the year during talks by the feminist organization. The second conference was scheduled for October, that was an unsuitable time since it was during the Rabi planting season, when the locals would once again be very busy. More importantly, the villagers felt that the sarpanch as well as the other members had the duty

and did not have to be present at these sessions. They didn't feel like they belonged to the same system.

As a measure of women's engagement and involvements in panchayat matters, the report focuses at their low attendance and also performance at these meetings. Strong patriarchal structures exist in this region of the nation, which limit rural female's physically mobility and establish the standards for how they should behave in public. High rates of illiteracy are another factor that contributes to women's low self-esteem and poor verbalization skills. Because the appointed women are unable to overcome these impediments, the accommodations for female have not significantly changed the situation. 3rdly, the choice to do away with the quorum requirements wasn't a good one for developing parishad raj since it removed the motivation for encouraging more individuals to attend and gave local government greater power.

Kerala, where a People's Plannings Campaign (PPC) was initiated in 1996 to revive the gramme sabhas, a fundamental planning unit, paints a distinct image. Prior to this, the gramme sabha sessions, like those conducted across the rest of the nation, were more official and did not adequately incorporate the public. In addition, the exercise failed to address the demands of planning and also development. The PPC, in contrast side, created a strategy for holding these meetings, detailed a strategy, and began with a clear vision. The main goal changed to being able to identify the needs that the populace felt. The organisers came to the conclusion that the folk's lack of interest in these meetings was primarily caused by two things: a lack of knowledge of the gramme Sabha's duties and authority, and the choice of venue, time, etc., which might not be convenient for the attendees. For these two problems, a plan was developed. Using political parties, a significant media effort was organised to inform the public. public

institutions like Elementary Health Centres, anganwadis, veterinarian hospitals, and organisations for women and community leaders. Alternative forms of communication, like street theatre and padayatras, were employed in addition to traditional media like the press, broadcast, etc. People Have Power was the campaign's premise, that was took home to the public by artists and troupes performing in thousands of locations around the nation to launch the campaign.

The grama sabha sessions themselves were methodically arranged, with attention paid to making sure that all of the specifics complied with the needs of the populace. For instance, instead of in the morning, sessions were held in the afternoon to accommodate the ladies, who were generally more liberated at this period. The decision was made to take vacations rather than work Cays. The best location was determined to be village schools. Organizers would go home to house and hand out printed invitations with the necessary information. The choice to split the gramme sabha meeting into two sorts of sessions—one in which everyone would gather together as abody and another in which they'd split off into 12 smaller groups—was a crucial one made by the organisers. Each smaller group would address a different area of development. However, it was necessary to maintain the groupings dealing with female, scheduled castes, as well as scheduled tribes. There was some flexibility built in to ensure that groups might be modified based on the local environment. The goal of the small group conversations was to identify the development issues that the population in that specific sector faced, collect data and informations on resource issues and development issues, and then find solutions to the issues that emerged from the conversations. In the month which preceded the PPC initiating campaign, it was expected that over 2 million people took part inside the grama sabhas including municipal ward

meetings. 26% of women attended the grama sabha sessions.

### **Women and Panchayat elections**

Women's lives have been impacted by panchayat elections in a variety of ways, including those of some who ran as well as lost, those who attempted to be nominated but were unsuccessful, those who lobbied on behalf of women candidates, those whose relatives and acquaintances offered various forms of support, as well as women who cast ballots. Thus, a variety of women have used the panchayat elections to familiarise themselves with democracy and its practise.

Many women's perspectives on their futures are drastically altered by a single, isolated participation in the election process. However the majority of female have run for office in female-only constituencies as well as the majority of them state that they could not have done so if not for the assigned seats, numerous women are motivated to run for office in gender-neutral districts. After serving their first term in office, several women are inspired to run for higher office, such as in panchyat samiti and gramme panchayat elections. Occasionally women wish to run for office in local governments or even in parliament. In light of their goals for civic lives in politics, women have benefited much from being acquainted with the political process. After serving their first term, numerous women desire to stay active in panchyats and communal affairs. Organizations utilise their expertise and abilities to assist women who are entering the political maelstrom for the first time, although if they choose not to run for office a second time.

However, numerous women who wish to run for office again are unsure about their prospects. There is a great deal of uncertainty caused by the rosters structure of rotating reserved positions. Given the status of the political groups, women are often unsure

of their chances of being nominated the very next round even when they are prepared to run for a general seat. The ladies are more apprehensive about the elections at the intermediate and district levels since they are being held along party lines. In places wherein political parties have a cadre structure, this is more obvious. The dominance of the party leadership also affects the ability of elected females to operate and act freely. Numerous women argue that the political group only views women as nominees for their compliance and mildness and are disenchanted with this system. A smart, independent woman might not have a strong chance of winning the democratic nomination. Just the district and intermediate algebra elections are permitted to use party emblems under panchayat rule. Elections for gramme panchayats must be held on a non-party basis. Despite this need, we find whether women's political history or willingness to associate oneself with local democratic units or people are often taken into consideration when selecting candidates for gramme panchayat elections. The majority of women who run for office or seek nominations have encountered several issues in this regard. The biggest obstacle to women becoming their own independent power group who have their own political connections is this. statements and ideas that may be based on genderfluidity, on the sharable experiences of female across a variety of social divides like caste, neighbourhood, and political affiliations.

Further election distortions have been brought about by the use of the rotational roster system. A popular misconception is that while certain seats are designated for female, the remaining seats are designated for males. An allegation that the political groups openly support this sort of distortion and that the administration has not made any remedial action has emerged from Karnataka.

The rotational system's guiding principle is that, due to their historically low portrayal in political bodies, women should only be given the opportunity to run for office through the appointment of points (wards). However, this does not imply that women from any group (including dalits, tribe, or OBC people) cannot run against males for general seats, neither does it mean so dalit women cannot run against dalit male for seats that are designated for the dalit communities. The tribal population and other backward castes will be in the same situation. Both indigenous men and women are eligible to run for seats that are designated for the tribal communities. A violation of the law would be to claim that males should sit in seats designated for women. Women's aspirations to go from competing for assigned seats to competing for open seats would be hampered by this kind of prejudiced interpretations of the legislation and their covert assistance from the govt's silence. There are several states that are affected by this issue. Many other states are reporting using the same skewed strategy. It will be necessary to wage a watchful effort to stop such violations of the basic legal rights of women.

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