

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
PANCHAYATI RAJ
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:950

ANSWERED ON:10.07.2009

WOMEN PARTNERSHIP IN PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM

Dutt Smt. Priya Sunil

Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the percentage of women partnership has increased after implementation of Panchayati Raj system in the country;
- (b) if so, the details thereof, State-wise;
- (c) whether the Government has conducted any evaluation of qualitative changes in Panchayats after augmentation of women partnership; and
- (d) if so, the details thereof?

Answer

MINISTER OF THE STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (Dr.C.P.JOSHI)

(a) to (b): Yes, Madam. After the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 came into force, elections are held regularly to the Panchayats and the representation of women as well as weaker sections of the society in all the three tiers of Panchayats is being ensured. The percentage of representation of women in Panchayats is generally higher than the mandated one third elected posts. The statewide break up of percentage of women in the three tiers of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is annexed.

(c) to (d): In 2007-08, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj commissioned a Study on Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in Gram Panchayats. The Study was guided by an Academic Advisory Committee and was based on a nationwide survey carried out by AC Neilson ORG-MARG, New Delhi. Prof. Niraja Gopal Jayal of Jawahar Lal Nehru University, New Delhi supervised the writing up of the principal conclusions. The Study Report was released on 24th April, 2008 at the National Convention of Presidents of Zila Parishads and Intermediate Panchayats. This Study helped analyse various issues related to Elected Women Representatives vis-à-vis their male counterparts. It also investigated their socio-economic characteristics, tracked their political careers over the past three rounds of elections and, specifically examined the quality of their post-election participation in terms of performance of their roles.

An important objective of the entire process of empowering women through Panchayati Raj was to broaden the focus of development to include issues that directly concerned women. The major findings of the Study Report about the quality of their functioning in the Gram Panchayats are as under:

(i) Overall, Elected Women Representatives are functioning within an enabling environment at the level of the village community and the household. Quality of participation assessed across various dimensions turned out to be reasonably good. A significantly large proportion of female Pradhans reported executing the important role of being a local Panchayati Raj functionary. The responsibilities that accompany a high position in the Panchayat are reflected in their spending the greater part of their time in Panchayat related works.

(ii) Perceptions about change in the kind of recognition and support received from officials as well as the community were captured by the survey. The Block Panchayats take into account 'a lot' of the concerns voiced by Pradhans which reflects a positive impact of women's representation. There was heightened response from local Government functionaries towards issues raised by them.

(iii) The initiatives taken by elected representatives at the community level involve providing an enabling environment for ordinary citizens, especially women, both within and outside the household.

(iv) Due to encouragement by the elected representatives, the attendance of women in Gram Sabhas increased, the frequency of their raising issues also went up.

(v) The attention drawn by women towards issues of 'women & children' and 'sanitation' increased. 76% elected representatives mentioned an increase in the number of functional safe drinking water sources and claimed that the number of households with sanitary latrines had gone up. 72% EWRs reported that they were being involved in issues for providing civic amenities like street lights, drinking water etc. during their current term.

(vi) Around four-fifths of the elected representatives who have served multiple terms said that there was an increase in the proportion of girls getting enrolled in primary schools. Almost 78% female Pradhans reported making special efforts to encourage girls to go to schools.

(vii) Among the social issues, the discouragement of child marriage emerged as one which attracted the highest (70%) rate of intervention by EWRs. The problems of gambling and alcoholism were reportedly addressed by representatives in 40% and 26% cases respectively.

(viii) 62% EWRs mentioned having come across incidents of domestic violence and said they had tried to reduce it.

(ix) The awareness of people regarding the various development and poverty-reduction schemes was an indication of the efforts taken by the elected representatives in disseminating information.

About responses to specific queries about women's representation and their empowerment on account of participation in the political process the findings are as under:

(i) Reservation has played a significant role as four-fifths of all the representatives got elected from reserved seats. The role of reservation was also evident from the fact that it emerged as an important motivator (43%) for contesting the first election.

(ii) In the case of women representatives, prior association with any form of politics was low, and for most women the act of contesting the first election signaled their entry into active politics.

(iii) Husbands and other family members were reported as playing an important role in motivating women representatives to contest elections the first time. Their male counterparts were usually self-motivated.

(iv) The positive impact of entering politics and working as a Panchayati Raj functionary is evident from the fact that a sizeable proportion perceived an enhancement in their self-esteem (79%), confidence (81%) and decision-making abilities (74%). Becoming a Pradhan or Ward Member augments respect within the family (67%) as well as in the community at large (82%). This change is more perceptible with elected women representatives who also perceive an increased voice for themselves in decisions related to important issues including economic ones, in their family (66-71%).

(v) About 64% of the women Pradhans agree that more attention is paid to them when they take up local issues with the concerned officials. Two-third of the elected representatives reported that their interaction with line Departments and parallel bodies had increased and improved over time.

(vi) 60% women representatives mentioned that they did not experience gender-based discrimination in the Panchayats and they did not feel ignored on account of being women.

(vii) Female representatives reported getting recognition from their peers and community for the work done by them.

(viii) 95% EWRs felt that they could freely raise issues during Gram Sabha meetings.

The Study suggests that if women are adequately empowered through a political process, they would have enhanced capabilities for decision making, which in turn, would be reflected in the quality of participation, impacting performance as well as their own development. The framework for enhancing participation and Women's Development is conceived as:

Women's Empowerment - Decision Making Ability - Quality of Participation - Enhanced Performance - Women's Development