



## **Panchayati Raj and Women's participation in Arunachal Pradesh: An Evaluation**

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**Abstract:** Women are a vital part of Indian economy, constituting one third of the national labour force and a major contributing to the survival of the family. It is an established fact that the poorer the family, the greater its dependence on women's income. Gender analysis of most social and economic data reveals that women in India continue to be relatively disadvantaged in matters of health, nutrition, literacy and productivity. Keeping in mind the importance of women as human resource contributing to development, their participation in democratic processes was envisaged. As a first step, representation of rural women in political processes was ensured by a specific provision incorporated in the Constitution of India through the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992. The significant provision of this Act is reservation of one third of seats for women in all positions in local bodies. The provision is not only addressed the strategic needs of women but also tried to provide them space in local development activities. Keeping in view, the present paper is an attempt to measure the extent of women participation in the rural developmental activities and to understand, if any, the factors that hinder their participation.

**Keywords:** Panchayati Raj, Women, Arunachal Pradesh, Political Participation

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### **Introduction**

The 73rd Amendment Act 1992 provides a paradigm shift in emancipating the women and improves the status of backward classes and other weaker sections. It also provides an opportunity to the rural masses to participate in the decision-making process as well as in the formulation and implementation of the village plan. Thus, consequent upon the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992, Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly which receive the assent of the president of India, with effect from 30th April 2001, promulgated the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act 1997, by replacing the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) Panchayat Raj Regulation, 1967 (Regulation No. 3 of 1967). The Arunachal Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act 1997, thus, comes into effect from 14th November 2001. The relevant rules such as election, delimitation of constituencies and preparation of electoral roll have been notified, paving the way for holding the

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Panchayat election at the earliest possible. The state election commissioner has been constituted and started functioning to his discretion.

Hence, keeping pace with Arunachal Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, 1997, Arunachal Pradesh conducted the first ever general election or 8th election, since the promulgation of the NEFA Panchayati Raj Regulation, 1967, to constitute new Panchayat bodies, Panchayati Raj Election was held on 2nd April 2003 throughout the length and breadth of the state for electing 136 Zila Parishad, 1639 Anchal Samiti Members and 6485 Gram Panchayat Members. In this election, out of 136 Zila Parishad, the numbers of elected women in this tier were 45, which constitute 33%, in Anchal Samiti 577, which constitute 35% and in Gram Panchayat 2561, which constitute 39%. In the last Panchayat election held on 26th May 2008 the total numbers of women elected members in 16 districts are: 7347, women got elected 3181 in GPM, which constitute 43%, 649 ASM out of 1779, which constitute 36.4% and 59 in ZPM out of 161, which constitute 36.6% respectively.

### **Participation**

Participation of the people in any developmental activities is the means to achieve its ends. Hence, "it is increasingly realized that development is for the people, and as such an essential element in the development process should be people's participation". "Development cannot be planted from above and outside, the desire for it must emanate from within or essentially from those who need to be raised from lower rungs of socio-economic order to the higher ones". People have to make aware of their needs and proper incentive provides for the optimum utilization of their own resources and potentialities to achieve their needs by being a major party of their own development. "If people take active interest and play a positive role in solving their own problems and meeting their own needs, they will definitely acquire the power that was gradually usurped by the government and retained by it by default till date".

Participation like most development related concepts is an amorphous, Plastic Jargon that can assume quite different meanings in political usages and is, "ideal for manipulative purposes" . The concept – participation, cannot be generalized as there are various modes or styles of participation. A citizen participates in politics by any of these various ways – by taking interest in politics, by casting his votes, by working in the electioneering process, by influencing the decision-making process in the party of his choice, by joining the rally of the citizen's forum, protesting or supporting a decision of the government and in various other ways.



Etymologically, participation has its origin in Latin word ‘participate’ which means ‘taking part’. A simple dictionary meaning of participation is ‘the act or an instance of participating, a taking part, a sharing, as in benefits or profits’ receiving or having a part of something’. Encyclopaedia of psychology describes participation as: (i) “taking part or involvement in any activity” and (ii) “greater involvement of persons in decision which affects them directly”.

In a democracy, the meaningful participation of the people is a means for the sharing of political power in society. It is possible in a democratic system of governance where the people are associated with both the policy formulations and execution process of the government. Thus, sharing of power by the people is regarded as the key variable in democracy that affects the well-being of the common man.

However, it should be remembered that, participation is not secure for development through a legalistic framework, like the election process in the Panchayati Raj, where the people are associated with appointed officials for the development at local level. This sort of participation may be of temporary in nature and related to a specific work also. The general participation of the people takes place without going through a legalistic framework. It implies the involvement of people in development affairs on a regular basis. People’s participation, thus, becomes an end in itself and a permanent resource in the development process.

“Despite the ceaseless experimentation with participation and the ushering of voluminous literature, there seems to be no consensus as to the definition of participation”. It has become an umbrella term for a supposedly new style of development intervention and a central plank on which an alternative development strategy is to build. However, there seems to be an agreement as to centrality of participation “as an indispensable feature” and that participation can play a vital role in development by stimulating people’s initiatives and mobilizing their resources.

At the operational stage of a development project, “participation implies a systematic management system and a value that aspires to involve the people in each of the following phases of the programme or project cycle such as in, decision-making, implementation, benefits and evaluation”. Ultimately, it is expected to empower the people by opening “the gates of local governments and by ensuring a more equitable sharing of power and a higher level of political awareness and strength for the disadvantaged people”.

With the passage of time, however, it became evident that the concept of participation was probably overburdened with lofty promises and rhetorical goals, and participatory development strategies have largely failed to live up to expectations. In many instances, it was observed that participatory initiatives failed to address the real socio-economic situations in most of the rural areas, which have only served the interests



of the ruling regimes and their allies in the rural areas. “The critics also warned that participation may in fact be used as an effective tool of control and centralization of power by the central state”.

Nevertheless, participation continued to be at the core of development activities and since 1970s, numerous rural and community development projects, concentrating on specific target of population such as the poor, marginal and landless peasants, the industrial workers, the squatter population, vulnerable rural women and malnourished children have been launched. Thus, in the context of backward tribal areas like Arunachal Pradesh, participation is an important key variable for the development of the state as a whole.

Since, the “participation” has become the core of developmental activities, measuring of the extent of people’s participation in the working of Panchayati Raj Institutions is necessary. Hence, keeping in mind the importance of women as human resource contributing to development, their participation in democratic processes was envisaged. As a first step, representation of rural women in political processes was ensured by a specific provision incorporated in the Constitution of India through the 73rd Amendment act, 1992. The significant provision of new Panchayati Raj Act is reservation of one third of seats for women in all positions in local bodies. The provision not only addressed the strategic needs of women but also tried to provide them space in local development activities. Hence, by keeping the importance of women participation in the developmental activities and in the decision-making process into account, the present paper is an attempt to measure the extent of women participation in the process of decentralized planning initiated by Panchayati Raj Institution in Arunachal Pradesh.

### **Participation of Women**

Women constituted about 50 percent of the country’s population. However, they are the largest excluded category in almost all aspects. They have been denied their rights and liberties by the male dominated Indian society for which their social, economic and political status has remained relatively low. For centuries they have been discriminated in all walks of life and treated as “second class citizens”. However, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. 1992 opened a new chapter in the history of democratic decentralization in India by devolving power to the people and gives opportunities to women folk to participate actively in the decision-making process. Under this new provision, a new type of leadership in the form of women have emerged on the scene, as the Act provides for reservation of seats for women in all the three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Not only have they emerged as Gram Panchayat, but also in Anchal Samiti and Zila Parishad. But, how far the constitutional provisions have been translated into reality? Hence, this paper is an attempt to measure the extent of women participation in the decision-making process and developmental activities by benefiting the constitutional provisions.

In the present study it has found that women who are elected as Zila Parishad and Anchal Samiti members participated in the planning and implementation of different developmental programmes. However, in case of women who are elected as Gram Panchayat Members are rarely participated in the planning process. It is due to the fact that instead of them they send their husband in the meeting because most of them are uneducated. They do not know anything about different developmental schemes and other related provision due to which they have no idea to take any decision and hence escape from the Panchayat meetings. In fact, most of them suffer from lack of awareness, experience, knowledge, skill, low level of education, lack of exposure, influence of family and social outlook. Hence, the above stated reasons are responsible for negligible participation of women. In this tribal state the patriarchal system is still prevailing due to which, the family members do not encourage the women to go outside by leaving their responsibility of household management. The male members hold that the job of the women is to cook and serve and the governance is not their job. Thus, the patriarchal influences and traditional norms of this society also hinder the path of women's participation in the governance. A case study of West Siang district reveals that:

**Table No. 1 Do the women really participate in the planning process?**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Common Villagers	24(23.07)	80(76.92)	104(99.99)
Local intellectual	28(26.92)	76(73.02)	104(99.99)
Panchayat Leaders	36(40.44)	53(59.55)	89(99.99)
Govt. Officials	3(30.00)	7(70.00)	10(100.00)
<b>Total</b>	<b>91(29.64)</b>	<b>216(70.35)</b>	<b>307(100.00)</b>

In this study we found that, 29.64 per cent of the respondents hold that women do actively participate in the planning process especially those who are elected as Anchal Samiti Members and Zila Parishad Members. However, they pointed out that, the women who are elected as Gram Panchayat Members do not participate in the planning process. Instead of them they send their husband in the meeting because most of them are uneducated. They do not know anything about different developmental schemes and other related provision due to which they have no idea to take any decision and hence escape from the Panchayat meetings. On the other hand, majority of the respondents which constitute 70.35 per cent hold that women participation is totally negligible. It is due to the fact that most of them suffer from lack of awareness, experience, knowledge, skill, low level of education, lack of exposure, influence of family and social outlook. Hence, the above stated reasons are responsible for negligible participation of women. In the study

area, still patriarchal system is prevailing due to which, the family members do not encourage the women to go outside by leaving their responsibility of household management. The male members hold that the job of the women is to cook and serve and the governance is not their job. Thus, the patriarchal influences and traditional norms of this society also hinder the path of women's participation in the governance. However, the participation of women is gradually increasing in comparison to succeeding years. This fact can be drawn from the following table:

**Table: 1 the total percentage of women elected representatives in 2019 Panchayat Election in West Siang District are as follows.**

Zilla Parishad Member (ZPM)	:-	ZPC	Male	1
	:-	ZPM	Male	9
	:-	ZPM	Female	5
			<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>
			<b>Female %</b>	<b>33%</b>
Gram Panchayat Member (GPM)	:-	GPM	MALE	204
	:-	GPM	FEMALE	137
	:-		<b>Total</b>	<b>341</b>
			<b>Female %</b>	<b>40%</b>
Gram Panchayat Chairperson (GPC)	:-	GPC	MALE	52
	:-	GPC	FEMALE	41
	:-		<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>
			<b>Female %</b>	<b>39%</b>

From the above table it can be draw that the elected representatives of women in Gram Panchayat and Gram Panchayat Chairperson is more than their reserved seats and in Zila Prishad seats the women is represented their reserved seat of 33 per cent only. Thus, it can be analysed that more participation of women is seen in the seats of Gram Panchayat Members. Some of the women in Gram Panchayat Members are got elected from unreserved seat which shows their interest to become a leader of their village, However, elected as a Panchayat Members is not an end in itself? Beyond, it is necessary that they must take active participation in the decision-making process as well as in the process of formulation and implementation of various developmental programmes. In fact, it has found that majority of the women, no doubt has got elected as Gram Panchayat but their participation in decision making process is negligible. Hence, due to the fact, the



author finally tried to recommend certain measures to encourage women participation in the various developmental activities as well as in the decision-making process.

### **Concluding observations:**

While summing up, it can be concluded that women usually do not take active part in the decision-making process as well as in the formulation and implementation of developmental programmes. Though some of them do participate, but not by their own initiative, rather whenever they are called by the officers with few exceptions. It is due to the fact that most of them are engaged in agricultural activities. Another reason is that they are suffering from lack of awareness of various rural developmental programmes. Further, it has also found that apart from their busy schedule they are not encouraged by the Panchayati Raj representatives to participate in the planning process.

However, it should be remembered that the best solution to encourage the women participation in the developmental programmes does not rest with the role of group of individuals; rather it also needs self-initiatives and interest. Thus, the lack of participation of the women in the developmental programmes is not exclusively the responsible of the Panchayati Raj representatives, though to some extent there requires the encouragement of the Panchayati Raj representatives and family members. At the same time one's own initiative is equally required for the effective implementation of any developmental programmes. In fact, the main reason behind the less participation of the women in the planning process in the state is due to lack of awareness. Hence, in order to make full participation of women in the planning process following are the some of the important recommendations:

- Rigorous awareness campaign such as, workshop, demonstration, seminar, symposium etc. are to be conducted in the rural areas in order to make full participation of the women in particular and people in general. Besides, there is also need for launching more and more awareness campaigning in favour of women's empowerment. Mass media, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Political Parties, Self Help Group (SHGs) has a significant role to play in this context. These groups should generate awareness about the significant of women's empowerment so that the process of political participation of women will be real and in its true sense.
- Further, in order to encourage the participation of women there should not be any social obligations. Women representatives should be support by the family members and society as a whole. Husband should not put any restriction and they should not attend the Panchayat meeting instead of their wife, rather the husband should encourage and support the cause of their wife to make them active participation in any programmes.



- In order to make women participation more effective, efficient and successful there is a need of vital changes in traditional, social attitude and patriarchal values of society. There is also need for positive attitudinal change and mental make-up of the male folk in favour of women's participation. They should be given appropriate training to improve their knowledge base and capacity level relating to their rights, responsibilities and duties in the functioning of Panchayat bodies. They should be made acquainted with the procedures of Panchayati Raj rules, regulations and financial management.
- The formal reservation seats for women in Panchayati Raj structures and election etc, is not a significant condition for their effective participation unless and until it is supplemented by the measures which help in solving the socio-economic pressures inhabiting them. The same can be realized by mobilizing women through interpersonal communication and by enhancing educational facilities at their doorstep.

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