

## Women Political Participation -Opportunities And Challenges: A Case study of District Kulgam of Jammu and Kashmir State, India

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**Abstract:** This study was undertaken to understand the socio economic, political and educational background of the women representatives in the district Kulgam of Jammu and Kashmir, India. To find out the factors that hinder process of political participation of women of the area under study. To explore the awareness, interests and involvement of women elected in Halqa panchayat. The study explores the involvement of elected women members in decision-making and attempts at understanding the change in attitudes and role perception of women representatives after being elected. Kulgam district comprises of 5 blocks including Devsar, D.H Pora, Kulgam, Pahloo, and Quimoh (main block). There are total of 76 females Panchs in Block Devsar out of which 8 were taken for the study. From D.H. Pora out of 102 female Panchs 10 were taken. From Kulgam out of total 57 Panchs 6 were selected. From block Pahloo out of 32 Panchs 3 were taken and from block Quimoh main block out of total 37 female Panchs 3 were selected. So a sample of 10 % from each block was randomly selected. Tools used were structured questionnaire, Personal observation and Collection of data from official sources (Rural Development Department, Kulgam). The study findings affirm the variations in the political profile of the female elected Panchs. Majority of them were not having any political affiliations but the pressure from family especially from husbands paved their way into the local bodies. It was observed from the study that a major section of elected women representatives were illiterate. The study recorded that the decision making of women is low. It was observed that the major obstacle for female Panchs was male dominance. The study confirms the value of gender quotas as an important tool for moving us toward our goal of gender responsive governance, insofar as the mere presence of women can transform patriarchal frameworks

**Key words:** Women Political Participation , Opportunities , Challenges

### **Introduction:**

The introduction of Jammu & Kashmir panchayati Raj act, 1989 is an important governmental intervention for maximizing women participation in rural Kashmir. The study relates to panchayat raj institutes in district kulgam with special emphasis on the elected women representatives, their opportunities and challenges. Though in Kashmir the panchayat is based on three tiers, this study is based on the basic tier i.e Halqa panchayat where the scope of local women participation is more in the district of kulgam .

The past over two decades of conflict have deeply affected people's livelihood, their living environments, health, eating habits, their work and workplaces, their access to education and so on. But it is the women of Kashmir who have felt its impact most severely. Women are affected by its short and long-term effects and thus are among the most vulnerable groups during conflict for more reasons than just violence. Be it the economic deprivation,

displacement, poverty or gender-based violence, the costs of conflict are borne disproportionately by women and their children. In the absence of an earning member in the family, women are forced to earn a livelihood and feed the family which is not easy, being part of traditional conservative societies and also due to the shrunk economic opportunities in the wake of the conflict. Widows especially are often unable to provide for themselves and their families due to cultural and religious restraints, lack of education etc. It is indicative that most women sufferers are from villages.

Though there are many challenges to women empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir, the main barriers to women empowerment are:

- Violence against women,
- Lack of decision-making authority,
- Lack of participation in political affairs,
- Poor and low status of women,
- Lack of education and
- Lack of awareness

So all these disadvantages and restrictions imposed on women in utilizing their rights independently and restrictions on their movements are further imposing limitations in availing the opportunities of gainful employment of women. This all has led to a certain level of subjugation of women in Kashmir. In this context the importance of women participation and empowerment of women through panchayati raj institutions in Kashmir is a critical subject matter that needs to be in the lime light. It is also imperative to study the roles and responsibilities, threats and challenges of the elected women representatives in Kashmir wherein their initiative, administrative acumen, leadership strengths and weaknesses, decision-making and ability etc. needs to be investigated in detail so as to make recommendations to ameliorate the existing impasse and to facilitate empowerment of women as a whole.

In this light the present study has attempted to examine various issues related to the roles and responsibilities of the newly elected women representatives, their level of awareness, and obstacles and problems faced by them. Interests and change in perception. The important component of empowerment that is decision making was also assessed.

### **Rationale for the study**

The constitutional amendment has indeed been a major step towards political empowerment of women through Panchayati Raj Institutions. This has resulted in the entry of large number of women into decision making bodies in the rural areas, who were otherwise home makers. But “which women have been able to take advantages of their entitlement? Are they aware of the change brought by the central government programs reforms and social acts? And how they respond to them?” These are few queries which need to be explored.

On the other hand, participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions had led to a lot of debate on the functioning of women members in these institutions. Contradictory reports about the story of women member’s participation, some triumphant, other tragic has enhanced the curiosity of researchers.

How far has the constitutional goal of equality been achieved in district kulgam and whether the act has helped elected women representatives to get recognized as equal partners in village administrative responsibilities and duties. Also the question needs to be answered whether the reservation has helped them to overcome the socio cultural barriers that has hampered their growth so far. In fact this study attempts to study the various dimensions of

elected women representatives to provide a body of knowledge for evaluation and modification of the patterns of implementation of the act and provide certain flexibilities in its structure.

### **Main objectives of the study**

1. To understand the socio economic, political and educational background of the women representatives in the area under study.
2. To find out the factors that hinder process of political participation of women of the area under study.
3. To explore the awareness, interests and involvement of women elected in Halqa panchayat.
4. To study the involvement of elected women members in decision-making.
5. To understand the change in attitudes and role perception of women representatives after being elected.

### **Methodology**

#### **Area of study**

District Kulgam of Jammu and Kashmir, India was selected for the study.

#### **District profile**

District Kulgam is a newly created district that came into existence after being carved out from district Anantnag and made functional administratively with effect from 2nd April, 2007.

#### **Area and Administrative set-up.**

The geographical area of the district is about 1067 Sq Kms which includes 474 Sq. Kms of forest area (44.42 %). District Kulgam comprises of three tehsils namely Kulgam, Devsar and Damhal Hanjipora. There are 8 Naibats viz; Kulgam, Qaimoh, Mirhama, Yaripora, Devsar, Chowgam, D.H, Pora and Nagam .There are also 6 Community Development Blocks out of which 4 blocks viz Kulgam , D.H. Pora, Pahloo and Devsar are fully while as block Qaimoh and Qazigund are partly within the administrative jurisdiction of the District. As per census 2011 the district consists of 265 villages out of which 259 villages are inhabited villages and 6 villages are un-inhabited. There are 5 Municipal Committees viz; Kulgam, Qaimoh, Devsar, Yaripora and Frisal. Out of four assembly segments, two assembly segments namely H.S. Bugh and Devsar fall partly in the District while as the remaining two constituencies namely Kulgam and Noorabad fall fully in the District.

#### **Population features**

As per 2011 Census, the District has 60398 households with a population of 4, 23,181 souls consisting of 216873 males & 206308 females with a sex ratio of 951 females per 1000 males. Population of the District is predominantly Muslims followed by Hindus and Sikhs. About 5.40 % of the total population (2011 Census) is Schedule Tribe.

#### **Rural-Urban Composition:**

The district is mostly rural in character except the notified areas of MC Qaimoh, MC Kulgam, MC Devsar, MC Yaripora and MC Frisal. As many as 368977 persons, constituting

87.20 % of total population, live in rural areas while as only 54204 persons contributing 12.80 % to the population live in urban areas in the District as per results of the 2011 Census. Apart from Kulgam, four MCs namely Qaimoh, Devsar, Yaripora and Frisal came into being during the year 2006.

Detailed statement of elected Panchs.

Name of Block	No. of Panch Constituencies/Wards	Candidates Elected			No. of Panch Vacancies
		Male	Female	Total	
Devsar	238	162	76	238	0
D.H. Pora	312	208	102	310	02
Kulgam	216	138	57	195	21
Pahloo	116	84	32	116	0
Quimoh(main block)	158	106	37	143	15
<b>G. Total</b>	<b>1040</b>	<b>698</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>992</b>	<b>38</b>

### Sample

Kulgam district comprises of 5 blocks including Devsar, D.H Pora, Kulgam, Pahloo, and Quimoh (main block). There are total of 76 females Panchs in Block Devsar out of which 8 were taken for the study. From D.H. Pora out of 102 female Panchs 10 were taken. From Kulgam out of total 57 Panchs 6 were selected. From block Pahloo out of 32 Panchs 3 were taken and from block Quimoh main block out of total 37 female Panchs 3 were selected. So a sample of 10 % from each block was randomly selected.

### Tools used:

1. Structured questionnaire
2. Personal observation
3. Collection of data from official sources (Rural Development Department, Kulgam)

The structured questionnaire was administered to the respondents to elicit information about the participation of the female Panchs in Halqa panchayat. They were interviewed to understand their interests, role in decision making and constraints faced by them. Besides interviewing the female Panchs observation of few Gram Panchayat meetings were conducted and discussion with the officers was made. Secondary data was collected from office records.

### Review of literature:

Study done by department of community resource management and extension, Government college of Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir revealed that to achieve the women empowerment, advancement can be facilitated with the co-ordination of different sections of the society such as male gentry, religious heads, political leaders who should come forward and shun their

interpersonal interest even ego to understand and appreciate that the women are equally as important segments of society as men. Male chauvinism must go the sooner so much the better. Unless the male ridden society is transformed and replaced by a better socio-economic set up where men and women are equal co-workers, the future of human set up appears to be bleak.

Another study “Participation Of Weaker Sections In Panchayati Raj Institutions Of Jammu And Kashmir” done by Ashwani Kumar research scholar in the department of sociology from Jammu university revealed that women and SC’s/ST’s are not totally negligible in political sphere but they were in favor of empowerment of panchayati raj institutions because the devolution of powers is of prime concern to them and considered as the remedy of all loopholes.

Research done by Kumar, Slathia and Nain from SKUAST suggested that Capacity building of the members as well as the officials concerned should be ensured. This can be done by regular orientation programmes, peer to peer learning and visit to other Panchayats both within and outside the state for regular interaction among the members. It helps in interacting, sharing and exchanging the experiences. The Panchayati Raj Institutions should be helped to effectively mobilize the local resources through tax and non- tax measures. The resources can be utilized for the benefit of the poor peoples of the Gram Sabha. Regular campaign and frequent use of print and electronic media to make the peoples aware of the power of Gram Sabha and the development programmes of these institutions such as MGNREGA, Water shed management and conservation, drought proofing rural connectivity and other rural infrastructure activities. It is necessary for restoring the confidence of peoples in these institutions.

A study from district Baramullah – problems of women Panchayat representatives of district Baramullah revealed the sixty percent of women are illiterate which is the major problem in the active participation of women in panchayats. Illiteracy is the cause by which women do not understand their role and rights on the one hand whereas, on the other, most of them do not inculcate strong enough aspirations to play an active role in panchayats. They presume that they do not have any significant role in panchayats. Women also lack confidence in their ability and therefore dot not take any initiative. Another major problem is that due to pressure of household activities, live-stock care and from work, rural women are not able to give enough time to panchayat activities.

## Findings and Analysis

**Table 1.1-Age wise distribution of respondents**

Age group	Number	Percentage
< 30 Years	0	0.0
30 – 40 Years	15	50.0
41 – 50 Years	13	43.33
51 – 60 Years	01	3.33
Above 60 Years	01	03.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

Age is an important variable in determining the character of emerging leadership. An analysis of the present age of elected women representatives as presented in table 1.1 reveals that

about 50% of the members were in the age group of 30-40 years. Next high frequency category is in the age group of 41-50 years. 43.33% women members are from this group. About 3.33% of the women members comprise the upper age group of 51-60 years and similar figures prevail in the age group of above 60 years. Number of young women representatives is considerably low; there is rarely any member below 30 years of age. In this context the women representatives expressed their views that very few young women in the villages had shown interest in the electoral process at the Panchayat level. The reasons being; a) educated young women are more interested in the jobs than serving as a Panchayat member. b) Women in general don't want to contest elections as they don't want to get involved in day to day party politics. Similar picture is found in case of older females. Almost 94% of the women representatives fall under the age group of 30-50 years implying that female leadership entering the Panchayats has realized the value of political participation at a ripe and productive age. At the same time it can be inferred that marriage and motherhood doesn't seem to inhibit women from seeking a political career.

**Table 1.2-Educational Status of Respondents**

Educational Level	Number	Percent
Illiterate	21	70.0
Primary	09	30.0
Secondary	0	0
Higher secondary	0	0
Graduate	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

Education is such a powerful parameter which is necessary for any value judgment, any political participation or any decision making. In this light as illustrated in table 1.2. Our sample shows that 30% of respondents had education up to primary level. A major proportion of respondents of about 70% are illiterate. There is not a single elected women representative having attained education beyond primary level. So from the educational status of the Panchayat members in relation to elected women representatives, it is quite evident that there is a considerable representation of poorer sections of the society. Indeed Illiteracy has been one of the prominent handicaps in Panchayats catalyzing the phenomenon of low self-confidence and dependence on others. Although these facts disprove the general perception that women representatives fail to execute their roles because of poor educational status. But it is an accepted fact that overall educational status of women representatives is considerably low making them more vulnerable to other hindrances. Backwardness in this arena proves to be a crucial onslaught on their growth and utilization of energies, thus restricting them to be more resourceful in bringing a change at the grass-root level.

**Table 1.3-Income-Wise classification of the Respondents**

Annual income	Number	Per cent
Less than Rs. 25000	05	16.67
Rs. 25,000 – 50,000	07	23.33
Rs. 51,000 – 75,000	15	50.0
Rs. 76,000 – 1,00,000	02	06.67
Rs. 1,00,000 and above	01	03.33

<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>
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Table 1.3 presents family income distribution across members. Majority (50%) of the respondents has an annual income of Rs.51, 000- 75,000. Income groups Rs.25, 000-50,000 covered 23.33% and Rs.76, 000-1, 00,000 covered 6.67% of the respondents. 16.67% of the respondents were having annual income of less than Rs.25, 000. Only 3.33% of the respondents comprised the high income group of Rs.1, 00,000 and above. This is due to the higher number of respondents engaged as agricultural labourers and house wives. It was found that large number of respondents fall in the low-income group. It was well visualized that very little opportunities and freedom have been provided to women in seeking employment in rural areas due to traditionally developed and prevailing backward social and cultural system. Inequalities in work participation were highly prevalent among the women of different income groups. At the same time, various studies also postulate the fact that poverty is not the sole cause, other socio-cultural factors also influence the phenomena of Women respondents' participation in work.

**Table 1.4-Occupational-wise classification of the Respondents**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
House wife	13	43.33
Agriculture and House hold work	17	56.67
Labour	0	0
Self-employed	0	0
Industrial labour	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

Occupation is one of the vital parameter for measuring social background of the leaders because it builds up one's attitude, preference pattern and political outlook. The occupational pattern of respondents doesn't vary much. It has been portrayed in table 1.3. The findings reveal that occupational pattern mainly confines to household work and agriculture based activities or both at the same time. 56.66% of the respondents are involved in household work only while as 43.33% respondents engage in agricultural activities besides doing household work. This confirms the adequate representation in the rural power structure is mainly engaged in non-economic activities. The uniformly low occupational skills of the respondents reflect a gruesome picture as there is a major representation of unemployed among female leaders. Most of them are dependent on husband or other male members of the family. There is not any profession or vocation noticeable among the female leadership.

**Table 1.5-Political Profile:**

<b>Political Background</b>	<b>Frequency (N=30)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Political Worker	02	6.67
Ex-panchayat Member	01	3.33
Husband ex-sarpanch or ex-politician	0	0.0
Any other family member as Panchayat/political representative	04	13.33

No political background	23	76.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

In order to understand the status of our women representatives, the political and ideological planes must be searched out. Political background is a complementary factor with Social background to get a complete picture of the actors of the field. Table 1.5 traces out the political profile of the women representatives. The findings reveal that women representatives mainly contested the elections for the first time without having any previous exposure to the political scenario at the leadership level. 76.67% of the respondents reflected their views by saying that they have entered into Panchayat politics due to mandatory provision of reservation. 13.33% of the women representatives held that they joined the panchayat politics merely due to the reason that one of their family members represented in the panchayat. Only one of the respondents had been a panchayat member in the past and considered this the main reason to contest elections again. Moreover 6.67% of the respondents had some affiliation with a local political party and maintained this being the reason to join panchayat politics. The facts indicate that majority of the elected women interviewed had been of the opinion that they held from a non-political background and entered into politics due to persuasion by their husband, family members or pressure from the village community.

**Table 1.6-Awareness about Powers / Duties of the Respondents**

Attributes	Category (N = 30)	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Powers</b>			
Judicial	Yes	0	0
	No	30	100
Administrative	Yes	15	50.0
	No	15	50.0
Financial	Yes	03	10.0
	No	27	90.0
Legislative	Yes	0	0.0
	No	30	100.0
<b>Roles and Duties</b>			
Construction of roads	Yes	29	96.67
	No	01	03.33
Women and child development	Yes	0	0.0
	No	30	100.0
Rural housing	Yes	0	0.0
	No	30	100.0
Education	Yes	01	03.33

	No	29	96.67
Awareness of the 73 <sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act	yes	03	10.0
	No	27	90.0
Opinion regarding Women's Political Reservation Bill	yes	15	50.0
	No	15	50.0

Increased awareness is one of the most valuable means of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. (*Beijing conference*)

One of the major objectives of our study was to find out the degree of awareness about the powers and duties among the respondents. Furthermore women respondents were asked about 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment act and women political reservation bill. The present study reveals that not a single respondent was fully aware about her powers. Although the respondents were enthusiastic about performing their duties. 96% of the respondents had focused only on the construction of roads/bunds and maintenance of streets. Only one respondent had undertaken the work of constructing a middle school. Duties like women and child welfare and rural housing were not mandated by the by the representatives. When asked about the awareness regarding their powers, a more dilapidated picture is presented. 50% of the respondents were aware about their administrative powers only while as they clearly lacked awareness about their judicial and legislative powers. Only 10% respondents were aware about their financial powers. Awareness about legislative and judicial powers provided a demarked picture with none of the respondents having any knowledge about these powers. Table 1.6 reflecting the awareness among women respondents regarding 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment act clearly indicates that 90% of the respondents are totally ignorant about the act. Although 50% of the respondents perceive that women's political reservation bill is essential or absolutely essential. It can be inferred from the above fact that majority of the respondents are in favour of the bill but at the same time their ignorance of political affairs restricts them to take benefits from their reservation status.

**Table 1.7-Decision Making among Women in Panchayats**

Attributes	Category (N – 30)	Frequency	Percentage
Level of Participation meetings	Full	09	30.0
	Mute spectator	15	50.0
	To fill the quorum	02	6.67
	No participation	04	13.33
Dependence level	Husband	24	80.0
	Family member	02	6.67
	Act on their own	04	13.33
	Panchayat leaders	0	0.0
Control the amount you	Yes	27	90.0

Earn	No	03	10.0
Participation in the Budget estimation	Yes	10	33.33
	No	20	66.67

The ability to think and take independent decisions is an important dimension in the empowerment process. Decision-making either at the individual or at a much larger societal or institutional level is a process that involves a lot of factors such as rational thinking, access to knowledge and information choices available and active participation in activities etc. It also depends to a large extent on the social and cultural background of the individual as well as the values of the society.<sup>iii</sup>

Subjugation of women to a large extent is a result of either denial of the right to decide for themselves or the inability of women themselves to take decisions even in their own personal affairs. Better level of awareness and providing opportunities for participation in public sphere combined with an enabling environment could lead to effective decision making among women.<sup>iii</sup>

**Table 1.8- Obstacles faced by the Women Representatives**

Attributes	Category (N – 30)	Frequency	Percentage
Male Dominance	Yes	17	56.67
	No	07	23.33
	Don't know	06	20.0
Militant perception threat	Yes	16	53.33
	No	14	46.67
	Don't know	0	0.0
Illiteracy	Yes	25	83.33
	No	05	16.67
Dual Responsibility at home and Panchayat	Yes	22	73.33
	No	08	26.67

The operational success of the decentralization process is dependent to a large extent on the efficient functioning of the Panchayats, which is regarded as the basic unit of governance at the grass-root level. The tiers in majority of the states are still to acquire relevant roles. Often, they are just reduced to fund-forwarding agencies for governmental programs being implemented by the Panchayat, instead of being allowed the autonomy to take on roles of policy-making and implementation. In this context an attempt is being made to gain understanding about the various hindrances that women representatives face. Respondents were asked certain questions in relation with the obstacles faced by them. Table 1.8 shows

that overwhelming majority of the women representatives encounter barriers like male dominance and discrimination, threat from militants and illiteracy as main obstacle in their participation as well as exercising their duties. 56.67% of the representatives considered dominance of males in Panchayat affairs as their main obstacle while as 23.33% respondents negated this perception. Rests of the respondents were not aware about it. Some of the women Panchayat members' responded grudgingly that male members of the Parties hardly recognized their worth. Usually, respondents were consulted after the male members of the Panchayat had taken the decision. Furthermore respondents were asked about threat perception from militants and it also provides a grim picture. 53.33% of the respondents affirmed that threat perception certainly hinders the process of political functioning among them. 46.67% negated this phenomenon by saying they don't feel any threat. Education being the critical parameter of political participation and decision-making provides a stark picture in case of women representatives. Majority of the respondents are educationally backward and consider illiteracy as a barrier in the political process. 83.33% of the women representatives are of this view. While as 16.67% respondents don't consider illiteracy as an obstacle in their political functioning. Poor education in a certain way affects their level of awareness, increasing inferiority complex and diminishing their self-confidence. At the same time illiteracy creates dependence among women representatives. Women respondents were asked about their dual responsibilities at home and political forums and how effectively they managed both. 73.33% of the respondents were of the view that they were not able to fulfill the two responsibilities at the same time. While as 26.67% respondents reflected that they could perform both the roles simultaneously without any hindrance. This shows that the household responsibilities prevent the women members from playing their role in panchayat effectively. The above facts also reflect the gruesome picture of institutional and individual barriers put before women representatives restricted them to rise above their conventional status. The level and forms of women's participation in politics is largely shaped by cultural and societal barriers in the form of discrimination, violence and illiteracy.

**Table 1.9-Perceived improvements and attitudinal changes after being elected:**

Attributes	Frequency (n=30)	Percentage
Change in Children's Education	0	0.0
Contesting Elections again and from a higher level	06	20.0
Perceptual change in status with Family and community	05	16.67
No change	17	56.67
Can't say	02	6.67

In the sphere of perceived changes among women representatives after being elected to the local bodies it can be clearly stated that there is not any significant improvement in their profiles. Table 1.9 presents the women representatives' perceived changes and improvement in light of few personal and political attributes. 20% of the respondents reflected that they will contest elections again and that too from a higher level indicating increased self-confidence. Perceived change in status in relation with family and community is experienced by 16.67% of the respondents while as majority of the respondents (56.67%) experienced no change after being elected. 6.67% of the respondents failed to deliberate regarding their perceptions about the change. This clearly indicates that the status of women representatives

has more or less remained the same. Certain obstacles and attitudinal differences have restricted the women representatives to elevate their status and at the same time may prove to be significant factors for de-motivation and losing interest in the political process.

### **Conclusion and recommendation:**

Women's participation in politics has given rise to many debates that whether gender discrimination will never be equated or equality is possible and will come through phased manner. But the fact remains that gender bias still prevails in societies. Women participation in politics is very less. What changed the character of Indian politics is the introduction of 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment to Indian constitution in 1993. This Act is often hailed as a trend setter, paradigm shift, and revolution etc. for the simple reason that it enabled thousands of women to participate in the grass root politics. In many places the women representation went beyond the prescribed percentage. This does not mean that political empowerment of women through the Panchayati Raj act has been complete. Reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has definitely set a positive trend overall. Despite many problems and limitations women have proved that if 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 panchayati 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. The present study in Kulgam indicates that the district has significant negative indicators in the area of women empowerment where female literacy rate is 48.49% only while as male literacy rate is 69.59% respectively and sex ratio of female is 951 females per thousand males (census 2011). The district has a rigid patriarchal pattern of family system. Under such back drop the study threw a light on enabling and more disabling factors which had important influence on the participation and empowerment of elected women representatives.

The study findings affirm the variations in the political profile of the female elected Panchs. Majority of them are not having any political affiliations but the pressure from family, especially from husbands paved their way into the local bodies. However, few elected women Panchs are thinking of likely to contest from general seats; and many women do report entering into politics only because of their own interest and motivation around development concerns. The community emerges as a strong influence in women's decision to contest elections. This calls for attention of programmers and policy makers on engendering the discourse around community participation and their attitudes and expectations of community.

It was observed from the study that a major section of elected women representatives were illiterate. This is obvious as under reservation policy, majority of women belonging to lower echelons of society who are economically and otherwise backward get into Halqa Panchayats as members and their level of education is fairly poor. Though level of education had impact on the intensity of political emancipation of women, it may be observed here that it has stunted their growth as members. Illiteracy is being considered as a major halt to their empowerment, hampering their participation and lowers their confidence and self-esteem. It becomes evident from the field data that elected women perceived that if they had been literate they would have marked their visibility in decision making, participation in the Panchayat activities, following up of developmental projects, having a proper perspective and vision etc. In other words it was clear from the study that the contribution of education in relation with women getting politically empowered was positive and highly satisfactory. Thus Training and education are perceived unmet needs, in district Kulgam where overall

education levels are low. Trainings need to meet the demand of women who have no or limited exposure to education; these need to go beyond information to include a focus on concepts of social and gender justice. Current training programs should be structured in a way that gives knowledge about roles, responsibilities and schemes, largely within the context of rural development programs. State governments and relevant institutes must ensure that trainings be provided to build these concepts and equip new panchayat members, including women, to effectively fulfill their roles and adopt effective response to strategic gender issues. Trainings must also be made relevant for members with fragile literacy skills; these must also include discussions around Laws, Acts etc.

The study recorded that the decision making of women is low. They have not yet learnt the art of decision making. They act as mute spectators and do not put their views or demands before the Gram Sabhas or meetings. They have not been given their perceived space to discuss issues related to gender or even schemes and infrastructure. This fact that has come out from the study highlights a grave concern. It has been well established that women experiencing discrimination and violence approach their immediate communities for help and support. Panchayat members, by virtue of being public representatives, are seen as authority figures and are thus approached to resolve problems. So when a female will approach a female Panch in the district they will face disappointment as the member itself is not able to take decisions thus hampering their empowerment and exhibits the inability for basic problem redress. Thus it is the pressing issue that needs to be resolved immediately, so as to strengthen their capacities at all levels and building their perspectives and capacities for an effective response to gender equality as a key area for action.

It was observed that the major obstacle for female Panchs was male dominance. They were not given a space to negotiate or even a fair chance to put views in the meetings. The women felt shy in facing elders and male members. These women have been socially differentiated either because they had fewer resources or the roles to perform. Gender attitude towards these women is a cause of concern. The raising and resolving of gender issues, as the study reveals are buried down before they can be put forward before the general public. It was observed that the male politicians in lieu of occupying political power introduce their women family members as dummy candidates and wanted to wield power through them which would naturally come in the way of women getting empowered politically in the absence of required independence and autonomy. This calls for a specific intervention for attitudinal change among male members of the Halqa Panchayats in Kashmir. Sensitization of men, both officials and elected members in district Kulgam is very essential for women panchs to be able to function effectively. Sharing and cooperation 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. It was also revealed from the study that these women do live in the fear of militant threats. In fact the hostility wouldn't deter the representatives from achieving their status and role in nation building, however these findings also affirm about a need to provide sense of security among the members who live in fear. The members, also being amateurs need to take as many as possible training sessions and should learn by participating in meetings and these trainings should be framed as per the needs of the women representatives.

These findings inform key conclusions. We confirm the value of gender quotas as an important tool for moving us towards our goal of gender responsive governance insofar as the mere presence of women can transform patriarchal frameworks. Yet we find that the simple adage of "add women and stir" is insufficient on its own—women cannot be solely expected

to carry the burden of transforming the governing process into a gender responsive ideal. Additional work needs to be done at the policy and at the individual level to transform these spaces into truly democratic and gender-equitable realms.

This research should contribute to our understanding of how quotas mandating women's representation on local governing bodies—the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)—are playing out for the individuals who comprise them and for the policymaking process, but it should also shine important light on a matter of increasing international interest: how to achieve gender responsive governance and advance the cause of gender equality and representative democracy.

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