

**PARTICIPATORY ASPECT OF GRAM SABHA: A STUDY  
OF TWO BLOCKS IN MANDI DISTRICT OF HIMACHAL  
PRADESH**

**Jyoti<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract**

*The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment to the Indian Constitution (1992) is a pioneering in institutionalizing Panchayats in India which engraved out the third tier of the Indian Political System. The 73rd Amendment exposes that Panchayati Raj Institutions had to be vested with such powers and authorities as would have enabled them to function as effective institutions of self-government. Gram Sabha is one of the important and fundamental features of the 73rd Amendment. The Gram Sabha is expected to be an embodiment of participatory and direct democracy. It is a constitutional body consisting all persons registered in the electoral rolls of a village Panchayat. It provides a political forum to people in the village which enables each and every voter of village to participate in decision making at local level representatives and thereby ensure transparency and accountability in the functioning of the village panchayat. Gram Sabha is also to act as a watchdog in the interest of the people. Gram Sabha' is totally reliant on a change in the attitude of the local people, who are the members of the Gram Sabha. Present paper is an attempt to analysis the awareness and participation of rural masses in the PRIs.*

**Key Words: Panchayati Raj Institution, Participation, People's Empowerment.**

<sup>1</sup> Jyoti is a Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Himachal Pradesh university, Shimla -5

## Introduction

Democratic decentralization is one of the basic pre requisites of governance. It is an important apparatus through which democracy becomes truly representative and real. Decentralization ensures grassroots level people's participation in decision-making process (Mohd Azam Khan & Tosib Alam:2011)

The basic objective of the democratic decentralization through reactivation of the Panchayati Raj system was to realize Gandhiji's concept of '*Swaraj*'. Mahatma Gandhi favored Gram Swaraj, strengthening of Village Panchayats and giving them centrality in local governance, but Ambedkar believed that the village represented regressive India, a source of oppression. Hence, the new state had to build safeguards against such social oppression (P Venkata Subha Rao:2014). The spirit and importance of Panchayati Raj system found place in Article 40 of the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution of India, which says: "The states should take steps to organize Village Panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government"(Sashi Sharma: 2014). This is how a situation was created where the need for devolution of powers to the third tier of governance at the local level arose very soon.

## Development the Institution of Panchayati Raj in India

The results of the top-down community development programme initiated in 1952 were unsatisfactory and this led to the formation of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee to suggest means of effective local self-governance in 1957 (Rahul Banrjee:2013). The Committee found that these had failed because they failed to enlist popular support. Hence, it recommended a scheme of democratic decentralization. For implementing it, the Old Panchayati Raj System (OPRS) was inaugurated on October 2, 1959 by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru at Nagaur in Rajasthan. Gradually it was introduced in all the States of India (Ranbir Singh:2013).

Despite various efforts the benefits of Panchayati Raj system could not reach the masses, because of poor planning, lack of able leadership, abject dependence on officials, lack of self-motivation, illiteracy and ignorance of the people etc. K. Santhanam Committee (1963) was appointed to look solely the financial aspect of Panchayati Raj institutions( Renuka Devi Nagashtty,S.Palekar:2013)

In 1977, it was realised that PRIs were not playing an effective role in rural development. Hence, a high-level committee under the chairmanship of Ashok Mehta was appointed to

examine and suggest measures to strengthen PRIs. The Committee recommended PRIs a two-tier system, with Mandal Panchayat at the base and Zilla Parishad at the top. It believed that the PRIs are capable of planning for themselves with the resources available to them, and that, such a planning should take care of rural-urban continuum ( D. Rajsekar 2012). Recommendations of the committee were not implemented because of change in central government.

Later on, the G.V.K. Rao Committee (1985 and the Singhvi Committee (1986) were constituted to suggest ways and means to strengthen the PRIs. But despite all this, these institutions remained at the mercy of the State Governments. After the initial ascendancy towards growth of Panchayats, these intuitions became a victim of the lack of political will, hostility of bureaucracy and apathy of people (Mahipal: 2004). Then Prime minister of India Mr. Rajiv Gandhi moved the 64<sup>th</sup> Amendment bill in 1989 for creating strengthened, universe and uniform system of Panchayati raj. The bill was passed by Lok Sabha but not get the requisite to two-third majority in Rajya Sabha as it was misunderstood as an attempt to erode the autonomy of state (Ranbir Singh, Dalia Goswami:2010).

At last P. V. Narasimha Rao's government enacted the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which was passed by Parliament on 23rd December 1992 and became effective on 24th April 1993. This Act has added Part - IX to the Constitution of India. It is entitled as 'The Panchayats' and consists of provisions from articles 243 to 243-O. The Act has given a practical shape to Article 40 of the Constitution and gives a constitutional status to PRIs. The Constitutional Amendment ensures, a three tier structure at the zilla, block and village levels, an election commission to hold election periodically, a state level finance commission to find out ways and means to increase resources for local bodies, reservation of 50% of seats in all the position of the three tier for women, reservation of seats for SC/ST in proportion to their population in all the positions of the three tiers, establishment of Gram Sabha for enhancing people's participation for their own development, and establishment of planning committee for local bodies; and an earmarked list of 29 items under 11th schedule (T.N Srishat, Jitender Wansik:2014).

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Indian Constitution (1992) is a milestone in the evolution of Panchayats in India which carved out the third tier of the Indian Political System. While the Panchayats have been the backbone of Indian villages to achieve economic development and social justice in rural areas. Gram Sabha which is an entity of constitution of India is legitimized statutory body to do multi-faced work at the village level. The main objective of introducing

Gram Sabha is to have decentralized planning and evaluation with people participation at the grass root level (H.D. Dawarkanath: 2013)

The gram Sabha is vital role in the creation of aware awareness in the peoples about the development works programmes etc. for that they called as the heart of the gram panchayts. The gram Sabha provide the people to understand their problems and development etc. Article 243 (b) of the constitution defines gram Sabha consisting of all persons registered as voters in the electoral role relating to the village within the area of the panchayat at the village level (Manjunath.S.Hosagur:2012).

### Objectives:

1. To know about the profile of rural people in the study area.
- 2 To what extent people are aware about the panchayati raj institutions.
3. Analyzing the people participations in the meetings of gram Sabha through village panchayat.

### Methodology:

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from the general public concerned to the village panchayat and elected representative. This was collected through question scheduled. In this study purpose cum- random sampling method was adopted in the first stage Mandi District of Himachal Pradesh was selected. In the second stage two block were selected namely, Chauntra and Gohar Blocks. In the next stage six Gram Panchayat (Balder, Bhadyara and Dlade from Chauntra and Gohar Bada, Jhungi and Sanj) were selected from each Gram Panchayat.

### Classification of Sample Respondents

A sample of respondents is essential to analysis the study. In the present paper a sample of respondents elected respondents and general public has been selected. In this table an attempt has been made to classify the sample of respondents.

Table 1

Classification of sample respondents

Respondents	Blocks		Total
	Chauntra	Gohar	
Elected Respondents	36 (37.50)	36 (37.50)	72 (37.50)
General	60	60	120

Respondents	(62.50)	(62.50)	(62.50)
Total	96 (100.00)	96 (100.00)	192 (100.00)

Source: *field probe*

Table 1 depicts that out of total respondents 62.50 per cent of respondents were general public and 37.50 respondents were elected representatives. Whereas block- wise data reveals the same trend. 37.50 per cent respondents were elected Chauntra and Gohar, while 62.50 per cent respondents were general public from both blocks.

### Caste- wise Classification of Respondents

Caste is a dominate factor in the society whether we talk about national state or local level politics. Data regarding the social classification of the sample respondents both (elected and general Public) has been given in table 2.

Table 2  
Caste wise Classification of Respondents

Respondents	Blocks		Total
	Chauntra	Gohar	
General	62 (64.59)	65 (67.71)	127 (66.14)
Scheduled Caste	25 (26.04)	25 (26.04)	50 (26.04)
Scheduled Tribe	3 (3.12)	0 (0.00)	3 (1.58)
Other Backward Class	6 (6.25)	6 (6.25)	12 (6.25)
Total	96 (100.00)	96 (100.00)	192 (100.00)

Source: *field probe*

Table 2 reveals that out of total respondents, 61.26 per cent of respondents belonged to general category, 26.04 per cent of respondents were scheduled Caste, 6.25 per cent of respondents were from back ward classes and 1.58 per cent of respondents were scheduled tribes. Block wise data shows that 67.71 per cent of respondents (Gohar block) were from general category followed by 64.59 per cent respondents from Chauntra block. It is found that general category of the society have large share in the PRIs.

### Sex-wise Classification of Respondents

In general Indian society called male dominated society, no doubt women constitute the half of nation and participation of the women is essential for the development of the country. In this table sex wise classification of the respondent has been shown.

Table 3  
Sex-wise classification of respondents

Respondents	Blocks		Total
	Chautra	Gohar	
Male	45 (48.88)	50 (52.08)	95 (49.48)
Female	51 (53.12)	46 (47.92)	97 (50.52)
Total	96 (100.00)	96 (100.00)	192 (100.00)

Source: *field probe*

Table 3 reflects that out of total respondents 50.52 per cent of respondents were female and 49.48 percent of respondents were male. Block wise data reveal that in Chautra block 53.12 respondents were female whereas in Gohar block 52.08 per cent of respondents were male. This shows that female strata of the society occupying little bit highest number in PRIs in the study area and it is because of 50 per cent reservation for women in Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act.

### Age Group of Sample Respondents

Age is an important determinant to understand life style of human being. It intimates the maturity, experience knowledge and worldly wisdom of person. In the present table age group of the respondents has been discussed.

Table 4  
Age Group of Sample Respondents

Age Group	Blocks		Total
	Chautra	Gohar	
18-30 Years	27 (28.12)	17 (17.70)	44 (22.92)
31-40 Years	51 (53.12)	50 (52.08)	101 (52.60)
41-50 Years	12 (12.50)	14 (14.59)	26 (13.54)

51-60 Years	4 (4.17)	10 (10.41)	14 (7.29)
Above 60 Years	2 (2.09)	5 (5.20)	7 (3.65)
Total	96 (100.00)	96 (100.00)	192 (100.0)

Source: *field probe*

Table 4 shows the classification of respondents according to their age group. This demonstrates that out of total respondents 52.60 per cent of respondents belonged to age group of 31-40 years. Whereas block wise data reveals that 53.12 per cent of respondents from Chauntra and 52.08 respondents were from Gohar block were from the age group of 31-40 years. This indicates that young strata of the society were more interested in the PRIs.

### Awareness about 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act

The constitutional 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment act has created a remarkable history in the era of panchayti raj institutions. And it is important to know that people should aware about the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act. Therefore to know the status of awareness among the rural people and elected members data has been collected in this table.

Table 5  
Awareness about 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act

Respondents	Response	Blocks		Total
		Chauntra	Gohar	
Elected Respondents	Yes	18 (50.00)	19 (52.78)	37 (51.39)
	No	18 (50.00)	17 (47.22)	35 (48.61)
	Total	36 (100.00)	36 (100.00)	72 (100.00)
General Public	Yes	16 (26.67)	21 (35.00)	37 (30.38)
	No	44 (73.33)	39 (65.00)	83 (69.17)
	Total	60 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	120 (100.00)
Grand Total	Yes	34 (35.42)	40 (41.67)	74 (38.45)
	No	62 (64.58)	56 (58.33)	118 (61.45)
	Total	96 (100.00)	96 (100.00)	192 (100.00)

Source: *field probe*

Table 5 depicts that respondent wise data shows that 51.39 per cent of elected respondents and 30.38 per cent of general respondents were aware about the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment act of panchayati raj institutions. Whereas 69.17 per cent of general respondents and 48.61 per cent of elected respondents were not aware about the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment act. In over all data shows that 61.45 per cent of respondents were not aware only 38.45 percent of respondents were aware of the act.

This indicates that awareness level of rural people and is not satisfactory. Even after the 23 years of Panchayat Raj amendment Act rural masses were not aware. It is not god sign for the success of grass root democracy.

### Opinion about People's Participation in Gram Sabha

In the lane of 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amend meant act. Himachal Pradesh panchayati raj act provide a provision of gram Sabha as a basic unite of democratic decentralization. Gram Sabha literally means a village assembly where rural people discuss their day to day problems they are facing in their village. Present table shows the data collected regarding it.

Table 6

Opinion about People's Participation in Gram Sabha

Respondents	Response	Blocks		Total
		Chauntra	Gohar	
Elected Representatives	Yes regularly	22 (61.11)	31 (86.11)	53 (73.61)
	Yes Irregularly	13 (36.11)	5 (13.89)	18 (25.00)
	Not at All	1 (2.78)	0 (0.00)	1 (1.39)
	Total	36 (100.00)	36 (100.00)	72 (100.00)
General Public	Yes regularly	40 (66.67)	49 (81.67)	89 (74.17)
	Yes Irregularly	18 (30.00)	11 (18.33)	29 (24.16)
	Not at All	2 (3.33)	0 (0.00)	2 (1.67)
	Total	60 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	120 (100.00)
Grand Total	Yes regularly	62 (64.58)	80 (83.33)	142 (73.96)



Yes Irregularly	31 (32.29)	16 (16.67)	47 (24.47)
Not at All	3 (3.13)	0 (0.00)	3 (1.57)
Total	96 (100.00)	96 (100.00)	192 (100.00)

Source: *field probe*

In Table 6 respondents wise data demonstrate that 73.61 per cent of elected representative and 74.17 per cent of general public(to get benefit) regularly participated in gram Sabha meeting, while on the other hand 25.00 per cent elected member and 24.16 per cent general public were irregular in gram Sabha meeting. Block wise data shows that Gohar block has higher percentage than Chauntra block regarding participation in gram Sabha meeting. Over all data reveals that 73.96 per cent respondents were regularly participated while 24.47 per cent of respondents were irregularly participated in gram Sabha meeting. This indicates that there is a good deal of participation in study area.

### Conclusion and suggestions

The constitutional 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment which was subsequently adopted by H.P. state by way of H.P. Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. The institution of gram Sabha has been assigned a very significant role in the upliftment of rural life and at the same time. It provides a forum for the members of Gram Sabha to participate in the democratic decentralization process. Given our socio-economic ethos, the Gram Panchayat can function effectively only if it has full support of the Gram Sabha and Gram Sabha can give such support only if it is itself strong. The present study deals with six Panchayats under the jurisdiction of Chauntra Block and Gohar Block in the district Mandi of Himachal Pradesh.

In the present study attempt has been made to analysis the awareness level and extent of the participation of the rural masses, women and the different sections of the society in the upliftment of rural area.

The study reveals that there is monopoly of the higher Caste in the grass root institutions in comparison to the weaker section of the society. And young section of the society is more aware and has an active participation in the grass root institutions.

The study also reveals that as per the Law of 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment act 50 per cent reservation has been offered to the women and because of this the participation of the female increase in the grass root institutions. In spite of this entire reservation still there is a dominance of male in the Panchayati raj institutions.

The study also reveals that elected member as well rural people are not aware about the provisions of 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment act which is a question for the implementation of the act.

In the meeting of Gram Sabha very little discussion took place on such items of village interest as formulation of a village development plan collection of contribution for community development. Since most of the respondents attending the Gram Sabha meeting were not aware of their role in the formulation of village plans etc., they attended the meetings generally as silent listener or critics.

In a suggestive measure it can be said that education should be the essential qualification for the members of panchayati raj institutions. There should be proper training center to create the capacity building. Gram Sabha should not be for the sake of quorum for this the procedure of gram Sabha should be in the light of electronic evidence. To aware the rural people the agenda of meeting should be discuss in the ward level before the meeting of gram Sabha.

Despite of these shortcomings in the working of the Gram Sabha it cannot be denied that it is the most representative institutions of democracy and decision making in a village where each and every voter can raise their voice. It is a platform where people discuss their day to day problems. It is the bridge between people and their representatives. It can be said that for the grass root democracy to be successful, the Gram Sabha will have to act as the fulcrum of the Panchayati Raj system.

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