

# Women Leadership in PRIs in Jammu and Kashmir: A Case Study of Block Kathua



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## Abstract

Women are an important section of social association all over the world. Women participation in politics has emerged as a new field of interest as well as research in different social sciences. The focus of this new field is not simply pointed towards the women's participatory trends but also towards the implications of male subjugated politics for women. Women face lot of socio-political ill-treatment, harassment, pressurized by their husbands to approve their decisions made by the male dominated Panchayats and are driven out of mainstream of politics. In fact, patriarchal culture and social structure which are dominant in India seem to inhibit women's participation in local governance through PRIs. The Socio-Economic environment would also have an impact on their careers. A study of these factors helps in understanding the roots of the problems and in making fruitful suggestions for improvement, in this context, an attempt is made to analyse the Socio-Economic background of women leaders. This paper analyzes the women leadership in PRIs in Jammu and Kashmir. The study is based on 2011 Election of PRIs, block Kathua. There are 90 women leaders which take part in this Election. The tool used for obtaining information was an Interview Schedule. The socio-economic and political background shows substantial variations in their age, religion, caste, education, marital status, political experience, and awareness of PRIs, land ownership, occupation and monthly income.

**Keywords:** Women Leadership, Jammu And Kashmir, Panchayats, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Kathua, PRIs

## Introduction

The study of women leadership is very important in modern political system because women across the world have fought for equality, dignity and liberty against inequality, oppression and subordination. Till long, feminists have been refusing to accept their stereotype roles and insisting that they are as capable as men. But they could not use such capabilities because of their given confined roles as they had been kept out of important streams of life.

The present study focuses on emerging patterns of women leadership in panchayat Raj. Reservation has provided women an opportunity to influence the decision-making process. Through panchayats they can move up their grievance, and other related social and economic problems in a formal manner. This is an essential in order to ensure better position for women in all the spheres of life. In the proposed study an attempt has been made to examine the empowerment of rural women in Panchayati Raj institution, in particular and in the larger social Milieu in general. India is sufficiently experiencing a move towards equality between men and women.

Women's presence in Panchayati raj institutions has remained marginal. Local self-governing bodies like the Panchayati Raj Institutions were dominated by men. In the case of Jammu and Kashmir, institutions of rural governance too remained under the control of men until the State provided reservation for 33 percent women in 2002. The panchayat elections held in 2011 gave women an opportunity to ensure wider representation. The emergence of new trend has drastically changed the sphere of influence of women politics and relationship during the last five decades. The increasing participation of women in the main stream politics and the world led to a completely different approach towards the role of women in politics. It's starting point the politics in the broadest sense as an enterprise dominated by male. The new approach started exploring several

innovative issues associated with the role of women in politics.<sup>1</sup> In ancient India, organisations for women's cause were started by men and the men continued to control issues and activities of women. In segregated society gradually the women leadership going ahead.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, women participation in politics has emerged as a new field of interest as well as research in different social sciences. The focus of this new field is not simply pointed towards the women's participatory trends but also towards the implications of male subjugated politics for women. This tendency also tried to offer a theoretical frame work for the understanding of gender dimension of politics. Voting right to women was provided first by the Madras legislature in 1920.<sup>3</sup> The position of rural women is more alarming than their urban counterparts. These women suffer more as compared to urban women due to higher levels of inequalities and discriminatory practices they undergo in their everyday lives. Majority of women working in the unorganised sector are from the rural areas. They execute back breaking tasks. They engage in 13-14 hours of daily work including fetching of water, looking after cattle and fields, looking, child caring etc.<sup>4</sup> During the first 50 years after Independence, the question of bringing women in the forefront in politics through opportunities and capabilities has been considered from time to time. After in depths study of various social and economic movements it was realized that women participation in political decision making was very important.

During 1980s the notion of women participation evolved in a big way simply towards the end of the century our planning strategies going ahead talking about women leadership and their empowerment. Women leadership refers to the process by which women acquire due recognition on par with men, to participate in the development process of the society through the political institutions as a partner with human dignity.<sup>5</sup> In many of the PRIs which are headed of women, not only has the participation and leadership of women made an impact on grass root governance, it has also devastated many of the myths regarding their powerlessness to handle power and responsibility outer their homes. Elected women have become role models for other women and for the adolescent girls. Their travails as well as achievement give a fill-up to the wishes for education. Some of the instances indicate that even conservative parents have now begun to dream that one day their daughters might play an important role in the village community.<sup>6</sup>

A leader is a person, whose leadership and direction are supposed to be accepted by the rest of the people in the community. Leader signifies a blend of personal uniqueness of the leaders and the social setting in which they are placed. In fact, patriarchal culture and social structure which are dominant in India seem to inhibit women's participation in local governance through PRIs. And often they are excluded from playing legitimate and energetic roles in rural community life owing to social and institutional constraints.<sup>7</sup> In this context, analysis of the socio-economic background of the women members is

imperative in shaping the nature and level of participation and this in turn relates to leadership, which implies that some of these factors are important in determining the nature of women's leadership in political institutions and a prerequisite for the understanding of the thought or behaviour of women leaders of PRIs. The performance of people to a considerable extent depends upon the Socio-Economic conditions in which they have been brought up and live in. The Socio-Economic environment would also have an impact on their careers. A study of these factors helps in understanding the roots of the problems and in making fruitful suggestions for improvement,<sup>8</sup> in this context, an attempt is made to analyse the Socio -Economic background of women leaders. Specifically to discover whether the socio-economic factors correlates to age, caste, religion, education, occupation, income, landholdings and assets have any noteworthy impact in determining the emergence of women as leaders in PRIs of block Kathua in Jammu and Kashmir. The study is based on 2011 Election of PRIs, block Kathua. There are 90 women leaders which take part in this Election. The socio-economic and political background shows substantial variations in their age, religion, caste, education, marital status, political experience, and awareness of PRIS, land ownership, occupation and monthly income.

#### **Research objectives**

The main objective of this research is to understand the extent of awareness and participation of women leaders in Panchayati Raj institutions, to analyse the Socio-Economic and political profile of women leaders and to examine the causes responsible for low-level participation of women in politics in J&K.

#### **Methodology**

In this research both primary as well as secondary sources have been used. The primary data has been collected through field work unit the help of interview schedule/questionnaire, specially constructed and designed for the purpose of this study. The data has been collected personally. Women leaders have been interviewed to the collect information about the women leadership.

The secondary sources varying from various books, articles in Journals, magazines, reports of central as well as state governments and edited volumes to newspapers clipping and internet sources are also used.

#### **Review of literature**

As it is usual before embarking upon an investigation of a problem to look into the accessible literature on the chosen subjects this section highlights specific studies relevant to women leadership at bottom level.

Rekha Chowdhary, *Panchayat elections in Kashmir* (2001) this article discusses in detail the Panchayat elections in Jammu and Kashmir in 2001. The author in article underlines that Farooq Abdullah was eager to exercise control over politics at the grass root level. In the Kashmir valley people boycotted the panchayat elections and on the other hand in Jammu, elections evoked an enthusiastic

response. The militancy affected the voting percentage in 2001 elections in Doda, Rajouri and Poonch. The effect of militancy was seen the most in the Kashmir valley where hardly any significant electioneering could take place due to the anti-poll campaign launched by the militant outfits.

Gangrade, *Emerging pattern of Leadership* (1974) expressed the view that So long as dominant castes remained united, the village development activities were properly implemented. He concluded that leadership in the villages is still regulated by castes, Kinship, territorial affinities and Economic status of households.

K.C.Vidya in her book on *Political Empowerment of women at the Grassroots* (1977) has described the emerging pattern of women leadership, their effective participation in the decision making process, their influence in these institutions and impact on the overall development of women especially in rural areas. The author has also analysed many social, economic and cultural constraints on part of women in their role in the Panchayati Raj institutions.

Pravin Seth in his book on *Women Empowerment and Politics in India* (1998) has presented the views of women representatives of various political parties' right from the first general elections to present day and their participation and analyzed them.

G.S Mehta's (2002) empirical research work conducted in Saharanpur and Gorakhpur districts of Uttar Pradesh reveals that traditionally well maintained socio-cultural System, mutual understanding and co-operation among different castes and Social groups of rural population has tended to disintegrate women leaders do not participate in Panchayat activities and development schemes due to traditional Social system and control of male family members. The study suggested participation of local people in the identification of village Panchayat, education, encouraging participation of women in Panchayat activities meetings, training programmes for the effectiveness of women leaders.

**Analysis of the Data and Observations**

Analysis of the women leaders in relation to the PRIs by taking into account the multiple determinants influencing PRIs power structure (the age, religion, Caste, education, type of the family, land-ownership etc) has been offered in this section. The key findings drawn from the analysis can be enumerated as here under:

**Age**

Age is one of the determining attributes for the emergence of women leadership, particularly that of village leadership.<sup>9</sup> Traditionally, age is considered an important factor in respect of one's status and prestige, particularly in rural societies; it was once the privilege of the older people to occupy the various key positions in the villages.<sup>10</sup> But now it is observed that, though always leadership especially in rural areas is still continued to be dominated by the aged.

**Table 5.1**

**Distribution of Respondents on The Basis of Age**

Age	Frequency	Percentage
21-35	5	5.555555556
36-45	34	37.77777778
46-55	28	31.11111111
55 Years Above	23	25.55555556
Total	90	100

Source: Personal Interview through Questionnaire

The data in the table depicts that majority of the women leaders of Panchayat in block kathua fall in the age-group of 36-45 is 34 out of 90 (37.78 %). The age group 21-35 consisted of (5.56 %) respondents whereas (31.12 %) respondents fall under the age group of 46-55. The age group of 55 years above is represented by 23 respondents (25.56%). The dominated group of Panchayat according to age wise is 36-45. 23 respondents of Panchayat in the table depict that more than 55 years.

**Caste**

In India caste play an important role in Politics. It is a very chief factor in deciding the status of people. A number of studied have been completed on caste status and political power. Most of them revealed that higher caste group have more political participation or dominant participation in politics, but comparatively lower caste group have little participation in the political process.

**Table 5.2**

**Distribution of Women Leaders on The Basis of Caste**

Caste	Frequency	Percentage
General	51	56.66666667
OBC	6	6.666666667
SC	28	31.11111111
ST	5	5.555555556
Any other	0	0
Total	90	100

Source: Personal Interview through Questionnaire.

Table5:2 reveals that the leadership in PRIs among women leaders on the basis of the caste. The major castes are: General, OBC, SC, and ST. Among them majority of the general comprise of 51 out of 90 (56.67 percentage), whereas all other castes are include SC 28 out of 90(31.11percent age), OBC 6 out of 90(6.67 percentage), ST 5 out of 90(5.56 percentage) participation. So, it is clear that Generals dominate the leadership pattern of Panchayati raj in block Kathua.

**Religion**

It is apparent that religion plays a vital role in the numerical dominance that determines the women leadership. It influences the voting behavior of the people. Every political party also chooses a candidate of that religion which dominates that particular area.

**Table 5.3**  
**Distributions of Women Leaders on the Basis of Religion**

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Hindu	81	90
Muslim	5	5.555555556
Sikh	4	4.444444444
Christian	0	0
Any other	0	0
Total	90	100

Source: personal interview through questionnaire.

One of the very interesting aspects to note here is that at local level, all the respondents belong to Hindu religion, and they constituted nearly 90 per cent( 81 out of 90). Whereas, 5 women leaders are Muslim and the remaining 4 are from Sikh religion. It has been noticed that the Hindu women leaders predominantly dominate the PRIs in study area. This representation might be proportionate to their respective population. Thus, it is clear that in PRIs in block kathua, there is no space for the candidate of other religion.

**Education**

The leadership pattern and sharing of power is significantly shaped by education. Further, effective socio-political participation is possible with adequate education.<sup>11</sup> the political participation of women is affected and determined by the general attitude of society towards them<sup>12</sup>. Lack of proper education, economic imbalances, social taboos and immobility explain why women have remained politically dormant for so long.

Formal education is an important factor for the political awareness to understand various developments in terms of rules and procedures regarding women electorate, behavior of women actual functioning, the role of the elected chairpersons and representatives needed. Further, participation of women from economically well off group would not be politically active until and unless exposed to education that gives a sense of confidence and encouragement to participate actively in the politics.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 5.4**  
**Distributions of Women Leaders on The Basis of Education**

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	15	16.66666667
Primary	15	16.66666667
Middle	18	20
Matric/10+2	38	42.22222222
Graduation above	4	4.444444444
TOTAL	90	100

Source: Personal Interview through questionnaire.

Data revealed that 15 (16.67 percentage) are primary educated and 15(16.67 percentage) women leaders are uneducated. Only 4 women leaders out of 90 are educated above Graduation and 18( 20 percentage) are middle educated. So, the above table depicts that higher secondary educated women dominated the leadership of women leaders in PRIs in block kathua.

**Language Proficiency**

Language is an important method of communication in any type of organization. In Panchayati raj institutions it is all the more for the women leaders to be proficient in the regional language. Language proficiency was required to be judged in terms of the leaders overall proficiency in using different languages. The table shows the number of women leaders with their knowledge or lack of it. Table 5.5 depicts that the Hindi known to 14 (15.56 %), whereas Dogri language known to 70 (77.78%) leaders. Gojari language is known to 3 (3.33%), English language is known to 3 (3 .33%), and 0 percentage leaders known the any other language. The data clearly shows that mostly all respondents know Hindi, Dogri, Gojari language very well.

**Table 5.5**  
**Distributions of Women Leaders on The Basis of Language Proficiency**

Language	Frequency	Percentage
Hindi	14	15.55555556
Dogri	70	77.77777778
Gojari	3	3.333333333
English	3	3.333333333
Any other	0	0
Total	90	100

Source: Personal Interview through Questionnaire

**Marital status**

As the study deals with the working and performance of women leaders in Panchayati Raj institutions, the knowledge of their marital status also becomes important. The table 5.6 on marital status of the respondents reveals with the personal interview with women leaders that out of 90 PRIs women leaders, 83 are married, 6 are widow and 1 is divorced.

**Table 5.6**  
**Distribution of Women Leaders on The Basis of Marital Status**

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	83	92.22222222
Unmarried	0	0
Widow	6	6.666666667
Separate/Divorced	1	1.111111111
Remarried	0	0
Total	90	100

Source: Personal Interview through Questionnaire

**Occupation status**

Leadership is determined by occupation acquired from one's own skill and knowledge that significantly influences socio-political values and ideology. Apart from being a source of income, the occupation of a person determines the life style and the class status of that person .<sup>14</sup> the data in table 5.7 fairly depicts that the 70 women leaders out of 90 (77 .78%) are housewives. Only about 2 (2.22%) women leaders are salaried employment 7 (7.78per cent) self employed. 11 women leaders are do agriculture work. But our study indicates that most of the respondents are housewives.

**Table 5.7**  
**Distribution of Women Leaders on the Basis of Occupation**

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Housewife	70	77.77777778
salaried employment	2	2.222222222
self employed	7	7.777777778
Agriculture	11	12.22222222
Total	90	100

Source: Personal Interview through Questionnaire

It is understood that women remaining as housewife are directly concerned with the problems like drinking water, children's education, sanitation, and child welfare and streetlight facilities. The study reveals that most of the respondents are housewives; they can focus all attention on locating grievances and getting them redressed by using their leadership positions in PRIs. Those who are not engaged in any occupation are depended on their parents or husband to support the family.<sup>15</sup>

**Family's Monthly Income**

Economic determinants are the most powerful social actors in the Indian villages as in most communities. Wealth is one of the important criteria for leadership. Some of the earlier studies had pointed out an affirmative relationship between family income level and leadership. According to Oscar Lewis "wealth is the basic criterion for leadership".<sup>16</sup> Women leadership position in PRIs is influenced by factors like annual income, which decides the opportunities to contest and command respect from the people.<sup>17</sup> Table 5.8 depicts that About 31( 34.4per cent) women leaders in PRIs in block kathua are under the income group of 5000-10000 ,29 out of 90 respondents are comes under the income group of 15000-20000,25 respondents are comes under the income group of 20000-above . Only 5 (5.56%) respondents are under the income category of less than 5000.

**Table 5.8**  
**Distribution of Women Leaders on the Basis of Family Monthly Income**

Monthly Income	Frequency	Percentage
less than 5000	5	5.55555556
5000-10000	31	34.44444444
15000-20000	29	32.22222222
20000-above	25	27.77777778
Total	90	100

Source: Personal Interview through Questionnaire.

**Familial Land Holding**

Land ownership is known as a essential factor in establishing dominance, which subsequently determines the socio-economic status influencing leadership positions. An analysis of the data in table 5.9 reveals that the 29( 32.22%) respondents fall in the category having land up to 3-9 acres, whereas 31.11%( 28 respondents) of the women leaders were having less than 9 acres land, 12 ( 13.33%) of the respondents are land less and only 21( 23.33 per cent) respondents having more than 9 acres land.

**Table 5.9**  
**Distribution of Women Leaders on The Basis of Familial Land Holding**

Familial Land Holding	Frequency	Percentage
Land less	12	13.33333333
Less than 3 acres	28	31.11111111
from 3-9 acres	29	32.22222222
More than 9 aces	21	23.33333333
Total	90	100

Source: Personal Interview through Questionnaire.

**Entrance into Politics**

The time-span of a women leader's connection with politics is an imperative pointer of commitment to the local activities. Data on the length of a women leader's connection with politics yet depicted that most of them had been continuously connected with politics for a clearly long time. In 2011 election, have important for women because there is a provision of 33% reservation for women in accordance to their population in Panch constituencies.

**Table 5.10**  
**Distributions of Women Leaders by The Period of Entrance into PRIs**

Period of Entrance into PRIs	Frequency	Percentage
0-5 year	90	100
6-10 year	0	0
11-20 year	0	0
21 above	0	0
Total	90	100

Source: Personal Interview through Questionnaire.

Table 5.10 shows that the period of the women leaders into politics as panchayat members.90 out of 90 (100%) women leaders have less than 5 years experience and this depicts that women leadership at the grassroots level doesn't have its deep roots in politics. There is necessitating political awakening among women leaders leading to their maximum political participation. Without experience they cannot develop their personality and cannot manage their affairs properly. There is a need of more experienced women leaders in the villages. So, they may deal with the local problems prevailing in the society.

**Attendance in Panchayat Meeting**

The performance of women leaders depend on their attendance in Panchayat meeting because it is essential condition for their participation.

**Table 5.11**  
**Participation of Women Leaders in Panchayats Meeting**

Personally attend the meeting of PRIs	Frequency	Percentage
a)Always	51	56.66666667
b)often(sometime male member of my family go in my place)	22	24.44444444
c)Rarely (usually male member of my family go in my place)	16	17.77777778
d)Never	1	1.111111111
Total	90	100

Source: Personal Interview through Questionnaire

Table 5.11 shows that the attendance of women leaders in the Panchayat meetings. There are 51 (56.67%) women respondents who always personally attend Panchayat meetings, 22 (24.44%) of women leaders admitted in their interview that regularly they attend the Panchayat meeting but sometime male member of their family go in their place, 16(17.78%) women leaders rarely attend the Panchayat meeting usually male member of their family go in their place, and 1(1.11%) women member never attend the Panchayat meetings.

**Motivation**

Earlier these women leaders were engaged in their household work and earning livelihood and they joined the Panchayat Raj institutions under the political obligation which is due to reservation provided to them. Before electing leaders they were misinformed that they don't have to work and just need to give their thumb impression.<sup>18</sup> it can be concluded that a majority of women leaders had been motivated by their caste/community to join PRIs

Table 5.12 shows that 37(41.11%) of women leaders are inspired by their caste or community, whereas, 34(37.78%) of women leaders are persuaded by husband/ family, 10(11.11%) of women leaders to take part in PRIs by their own decision and not a single women leader is persuaded by any political party.

**Table 5.12  
Motivation to Take Part in PRIs**

Motivation to take part in PRIs	Frequency	Percentage
Inspired by parents	9	10
inspired by husband/family	34	37.77777778
own decision	10	11.11111111
persuaded by political party	0	0
persuaded by caste/community	37	41.11111111
Total	90	100

Source: personal interview through questionnaire.

**Awareness/ Knowledge of PRIs**

Awareness about the existing political system is necessary for the functioning of the members to enhance and facilitate their performance. The political awareness of elected women leaders has been studied through the following components like awareness about the tenure of halqa panchayat, women reservation, functions of halqa panchayat etc.

**Table 5.13  
Awareness /knowledge of PRIs**

Awareness/Knowledge of PRIs	Frequency	Percentage
Satisfactory answer	42	46.66666667
Unsatisfactory answer	48	53.33333333
Total	90	100

Source: Personal Interview through Questionnaire.

Table 5.13 shows that 42 out of 90 (46.67%) women respondents of respective Panchayat knew the halqa Panchayat, the tenure of halqa Panchayat as well as about the 33% reservation in the coming Panchayat elections. Although they were attentive of

the 33% reservation but they didn't know about the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment and how it is different from the present system of reservation in halqa Panchayats of J&K. All women leaders support reservation and consider it as the required device to enlarge their representation from present minor level ,whereas 48 ( 53.33%) women respondents didn't know about the PRIs and it operation . data reveals that majority of women leaders are unaware of the Halqa panchayat.

**Conclusion**

The study shows that majority of the women leaders gave unsatisfactory answer related to panchayat. They were not proper known about the panchayat, their importance, role and powers of panchayat. The lower literacy rate is high among women. How a illiterate or less educated women member function as decision maker in a governmental system based on rules, regulations, proper accounting procedure, circulars etc. The current literacy programmes being operated by the Ministry of Human Resource Development can be modified to take care of this task and crash courses must be started.

Women Empowerment is a need of hour. It will boost both the quality and quantity of human resources with which development is possible. Thus if any nation has to develop women empowerment is must. The findings shows that the points raised by women members get less importance most of the times and this once again reflects male dominance in the local level Despite their ample representation. It has also been observed that majority of the women respondents do not raise strong protest against the refutation of their views raised in the PRI meetings. Hence, their indifference towards decision making ensures gain for the male which also supplements male dominance in an indirect manner. The optimistic attitude of the male outside and within the family can verify to be strong motivator for women leaders to perform their leadership roles of PRIs well.

On the other hand, it is also necessary to create self -consciousness and awareness in each individual woman. Another important effort required for real empowerment of rural women is to bring an attitudinal change in both men and women. The feeling that women are meant for household activities and raring children needs to be replaced by a feeling of equal partnership of women and men, to inculcate this, they must be imparted education for bringing about social and political awareness among both. When elected women leaders are able to voice their needs through the Panchayats and these needs are converted into policy by the state and national governments only then development will reach women. For this to take place the Panchayats Raj Institution must be strengthened so the caste, class and gender issues do not dominate the functioning of the Panchayats. Effective participation in the Panchayats will expand the ability of women which will lead towards empowerment. There is a need to put up self-confidence of the women as lack of confidence creates a gloomy situation.

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