

Can Reservation in Political Participation Empower Women and Influence Social and Economic Development at the Local Level? A Case Study of Northern India

Pareena G. Lawrence, University of Minnesota, Morris, USA
Kavita Chakravarty, M.D. University, Rohtak, Haryana, India

1. Abstract:

The 73rd and 74th amendment of the Indian constitution in 1993 resulted in the reservation of 33% of seats in the Gram Panchayat elections (local village level municipal bodies) for women, and also required 33% of the position of Sarpanch (village chief) state wide to be reserved for women. This research project examines the impact of this political reform on the empowerment of women and its effect on development policy in North India. The primary objective of this study is to examine the development priorities of women as compared to men and their effectiveness in carrying those priorities out in political decision-making. In particular, the level of participation and the independence of decision-making, the understanding of public issues, the choice of development priorities and the consequent impact on social and economic development at the local level of females as compared to males will be analyzed. Factors that constrain or facilitate women's political participation and effectiveness will be identified. To achieve these objectives, field interviews will be conducted with elected female and male Sarpanchs in the states of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. This project will be incorporated into a book manuscript that is currently in progress and will also result in two journal articles.

2. Present Status of Knowledge:

Persistent gender inequality and the marginalization of women in all spheres of life is an important issue in economic/social development, particularly in developing countries. The majority of women who live in patriarchal societies in the developing world do not benefit from the fruits of development and social reform to the same degree as men, as they are systematically excluded from full participation by male-governed social and legal institutions, often in the name of culture and tradition (Moore 1998; Basu 1999). Feminists, political scientists and development personnel have long argued for specific policies that integrate women into economic and social processes, not just on grounds of equity, but because there is significant evidence that women as policy-makers influence public policies differently than men. Unlike men, women encourage more participation by others and tend to give higher priority to concerns such as social security, health care, water and sanitation, and issues related to children (Thomas 1994; Bratton and Haynie 1999; Dollar et al 1999; Lott and Kenny 1999; Edlund and Pande 2001; Bratton 2002; Hust 2002; Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004; Duflo 2005; IDEA 2006a).

Relative to their share in the population, women are globally underrepresented at all levels of governance (IDEA 2006a). Recent research indicates that the most important factor that determines women's participation in politics in developing countries is the prevailing social norms concerning women's participation in the public sphere (Hust, 2002, IDEA 2006b). The literature also indicates that in patriarchal and caste/class based societies, weaker groups are not naturally represented without special measures (Jenkins 1999; Htun 2004; Duflo 2005).

Given the low rate of growth of women's participation in politics, feminist activists are calling for more effective measures such as, quotas and reservation, to increase women's representation. Quotas require that women constitute a certain percentage of a candidate list, and reservation, an even stronger measure requires a certain percentage of elected members of a legislative body be women (Htun 2004).

Both quotas and reservations are aimed at recruiting women to ensure their participation in political decision-making, despite prevailing social/gender norms.

The effectiveness and fairness of "quotas and reservations" have been extensively studied and these policies remain highly controversial (Mansbridge 1999; Caul 2001; Jaquette 2001; Dahlerup 2002; Htun and Jones 2002; Pande 2003; Htun 2004; Bratton 2005; IDEA 2006a,b). The main arguments in the literature include:

Pros

- Women's experiences are necessary in political life and in policymaking in order to represent the entire society (Phillips 1995; Raman 2002).
- Quotas and reservation do not discriminate but compensate women for actual barriers that prevent them from pursuing a political career (Bunagan et al, 2000).

Cons

- Quotas and reservations suggest that politicians are elected because of their gender and not their qualifications and it also gives political parties who embrace quotas for public relation purposes an escape route to avoid addressing controversial gender issues (Phillips 1995; Jaquette 2001).
- Women do not want to get elected as they have other interests (Verba et al, 1997).

In India, one of the primary achievements of the 1990s has been the constitutional amendment of 1993, which reserve one-third of the seats for women in the Panchayat. As a result, nearly 800,000 women have been elected to different levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the country (PRIA 2001). The amendments have been widely acclaimed as having opened up a new legitimate space where women have a voice in political and economic decision-making at the village level (Singh 1994; Medha, 2001; Raman 2002). These amendments have given women the authority to deliberate, debate and participate in the process of formulating policy and in the choice and implementation of development programs that impact people's daily lives (PRIA 2002).

Globally several studies have empirically tested the effect of quotas on women's empowerment at a national level, but very few have focused on whether women as policy makers affect the choice of economic and social policy, particularly in the developing world (Waengerud, 2000; Childs 2001; Htun 2004, IDEA 2004, 2006a,b; Jones 2004). In India, since 1993, many studies have been conducted at the local level to empirically assess the effects of the amendments. Two of the major weaknesses of these studies are that they are either narratives of individual elected women, or they focus only on the socio-economic profile of elected women representatives (Ghosh 1995; Athreya and Rajeswari 1998; Banerjee 1998; Bhaskar 1997; Kaushik, 1997; ISED 1998; MARG 1998; Pai 1998; Santha 1999; Kapoor, 2002; Raman 2002). In addition, male representatives are not included in any of these studies for comparative analysis. A more recent study in Orissa, India (Hust 2002) does improve on

previous studies by sampling 185 elected women and men representatives and examines their profiles and overall participation. However, the fieldwork for this study was conducted in 1998/99, only 1-2 years after the first post-amendment Panchayat elections were held in 1997 in Orissa and no information on development priorities/projects of elected representatives was collected. Another study by Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) interviewed 265 elected male and female Sarpanchs in 2000 in West Bengal and Rajasthan and examined the development projects undertaken by these individuals based on gender. However, they did not control for factors such as caste and social norms or examine the difference between preferences and outcomes. Their sample size was also relatively small, and the study was conducted soon after the first post-amendment Panchayat elections in West Bengal in 1998, so that the full effects may not have been observed. While both these studies shed important light on the subject at hand, the following questions still remain unanswered:

- Do men and women Sarpanchs have different policy preferences controlling for class, caste, social norms, and their individual, and village level characteristics?
- Given the marginalization of women, can women operationalize their preferences? In other words, does having a woman in office make a difference with respect to development programs and choice of economic and social policy? If so, can we isolate factors that lead to this result?
- What roles do class, caste, and gender norms play in influencing women's level of participation and the program and policy outcomes when they are part of the decision-making process?
- And the broader question, how does prevailing culture (patriarchy and traditional gender roles) affect the outcome of laws intended to bring social reforms?

In Fall and Summer of 2005/2006, my coinvestigator, Dr. Kavita Chakravarty, Reader, M.D. University, Rohtak, Haryana did some preliminary fieldwork in the state of Haryana in North India to field test the survey instrument and to further refine the research design. Her team formally interviewed 50 male and female Sarpanchs from 50 villages in the Rohtak District. We found that 88% of women Sarpanchs were over the age of 50 compared to only 36% for men. Only 12% of women Sarpanchs were literate compared to 84% of the males. None of the female Sarpanchs had any independent source of income and were primarily engaged in household activities, while 80% of the males were small farmers. The three literate female Sarpanchs were the only women who had undertaken significant initiative in various developmental projects in their village, such as improving the local school, investing in clean running water, in public and private sanitation projects and in pensions for widows. We also found significant differences in their priorities and the types of projects their Panchayats had undertaken compared to male Sarpanchs who tended to focus more on roads and small loans to farmers and small businesses for capital improvements. Our data on illiterate female Sarpanchs showed that male family members were the de facto representatives, and that there were no significant differences in projects undertaken or developmental priorities between illiterate female and all male Sarpanchs. These initial interviews have led to improvements in the survey instrument, and have sharpened the focus of the project design.

My previous research has focused on the economic empowerment of women in the context of the household and the informal sector. Several of these research projects have involved conducting field interviews with men and women in the household and the labor force in Ecuador, India, and Venezuela. This proposed project expands on my previous research interests, and takes me to a region about which I have substantial first-hand background knowledge and am a native speaker of the local language.

3. Plan of Work

The specific objectives of this project are:

1. To study the individual profiles of the women Sarpanchs elected to Panchayats and to compare them with male Sarpanchs with respect to basic demographic information and level of skill and understanding of public issues.
2. To study specific village level descriptive characteristics such as demographic information, geographic location, economic activities, measure of patriarchy and level of Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) activities.
3. To examine whether female and male Sarpanchs have different development priorities and to identify what these priorities are.
4. To examine the different public projects that have actually been undertaken by these representatives.

Characteristics listed in points 1 and 2 will be used as control variables to identify causality patterns with respect to 3 and 4.

In addition, other objectives include:

5. To identify the factors that constrain or facilitate entry and participation of women in PRIs.
6. To evaluate the level of participation of women in the Panchayat and their effectiveness with respect to caste, class and previous family involvement in politics.
7. To identify the problems faced by women (and men) in the Panchayat while performing their duties effectively.
8. To derive policy implications that will improve the empowerment of women and their effectiveness in the political realm.

To meet these objectives, field interviews in the states of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh in Northern India will be conducted. A team of researchers will interview both female and male Panchayat Sarpanchs. The unique social environment of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh is the primary reason why I chose these sites for my fieldwork. The state of Haryana has experienced significant economic growth in the previous decades. However, statistics regarding gender-related social development reveal that Haryana has the lowest female-male sex ratio in India and one of the widest gender gaps in literacy and health. The household structure in this region is predominantly patriarchal. Haryana represents the majority of northern and central Indian states that exhibit strong patriarchal norms. In

contrast, Himachal Pradesh has also experienced similar rates of growth as Haryana, however the statistics on gender related social development reflect a comparatively more progressive society, with higher literacy rates and female-male sex ratios and a relatively more egalitarian culture. Himachal Pradesh is more representative of the eastern and southern states in India. Comparing the results from these two states will provide additional insights into how preferences and actual policy choices between male and female Sarpanchs differ based on prevailing patriarchal/social norms and how these norms affect the outcome of laws intended to bring social reforms.

The state of Haryana has a total of 20 districts subdivided into 119 blocks. These blocks make up 6759 Gram Panchayats or villages, which currently have 2018 women Sarpanchs. The state of Himachal Pradesh has a total of 12 districts, 75 blocks and 3243 Gram Panchayats, which currently have 1110 women Sarpanchs. The study will be designed to randomly select and interview 250 women Sarpanchs in Haryana and 125 in Himachal Pradesh, using random sampling at the state level. An equal number of male Sarpanchs from the same block as female Sarpanchs will be randomly selected for comparison.

Prior research on the village and the survey instrument will be used to collect information along the following themes:

- Basic historical, economic/demographic information on the village and its patriarchy practices (purdah, limitations on female mobility and labor force participation)
- Basic demographic data on the Sarpanch, including family structure, current and previous participation of family members in the Panchayat, class, caste, occupation, asset ownership and source of income
- Membership and participation in other organizations (NGOs), training classes, and its impact on political participation
- Level of participation in selecting and implementing development programs
- Personal development priorities and other concerns in the village
- Participation in allocation of Panchayat budget
- Handling of complaints and concerns of constituents

I will prepare for the fieldwork from January-April 2007 and the surveys will be conducted from May 2007 -September 2008. A team of six-eight researchers will be conducting 750 field interviews over a period of several months (an average of two-three surveys per day). The research team will include research associates/graduate students from M.D. University, Rohtak Haryana. Dr. Chakravarty and I will supervise the members of the research team. Upon completion of the fieldwork, data will be entered from October 2007 - December 2008. The next several months will be spent analyzing the data and documenting the results. I plan to present the results of this research at two conferences: the 2008 IAFFE Conference and the 2009 International Development Conference. This research will be incorporated into a book project that is currently in progress titled, "Women as Policy Makers: Examining Grassroots Development in North India." In addition, I expect to submit two articles, one focusing on the overall effectiveness of reservation to the journal "Review of Development Studies" and the second, focusing on the different economic development priorities of men and women, and on factors that constrain and facilitate the participation of women to the journal "World Development."

4. Future Projects Emerging from this work:

One line of inquiry that might emerge from this work is to conduct a historical study since the passage of the 1993 amendment, of the impact of women's preferences on Panchayat budgets. This will require identifying in previous Panchayat election cycles the following: (1) which villages were headed by women and by men, (2) specific indicators from the Panchayat budget allocations from those villages in each cycle, along with (3) control information about the village (demographics of population, geographic location, economic activities, etc.). This research project will have certain advantages over the current study, such as a larger sample size (at least potentially, as all villages in the state could be included as long as the historical budget data is available at the district level office). However, in the sequence of research activities, the current study is planned first, as a historical study, if feasible, will provide very little information about individual Sarpanch's other than their gender and caste, and no direct information on their preferences or the factors that aid or hinder their participation. These are the key questions that this current research project will answer for the large sample of male and female Sarpanchs currently in office.

Another line of inquiry is to conduct a comparative study across villages with more variation in economic context, by extending the current study plan to include one or more other Indian states, which vary with respect to economic growth. This study would address an equally important question, "does economic growth translate into progress for women measured by active participation in political decision-making and choice of economic and social policy." To address this specific question one would have to look at a state that has similar patriarchal norms and culture like Haryana but has experienced limited overall economic growth, such as, Uttar Pradesh or Rajasthan. If economic growth, irrespective of prevailing social norms is considered to be a precondition for social and economic development and the empowerment of women, then Haryana should be in the vanguard in this realm. A research project could be designed to test this hypothesis.

5. References:

- Athreya, V.B. and K.S. Rajeswari. 1998. *Women's Participation in Panchayat Raj: A case study from Tamil Nadu Chennai*: M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation.
- Banerjee, M. 1998. "Women in Local Governance: Macro Myths, Micro Realities," in *Social Change*, 28(1), pp. 87-100.
- Bhaskar, M. 1997. "Women Panchayat Members in Kerela: A Profile," in *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, April 1997, pp. WS13-WS20.
- Bratton, Kathleen A. 2005. "Critical Mass Theory Revisited: The Behavior and Success of Token Women in State Legislatures." *Politics & Gender*, 1(1), pp. 97-125.
- Bratton, Kathleen A. 2002. "The Effect of Legislative Diversity on Agenda Setting: Evidence from Six State Legislatures." *American Politics Research*, 30(2), pp. 115-42.
- Bratton, Kathleen and Kerry Haynie. 1999. *Agenda Setting and Legislative Success in State Legislature: The Effects of Gender and Race.* *Journal of Politics*, 61(3), pp. 658-79

- Bunagan, K. et al. 2000. "The Quota System: Women's Boon or Bane?" in *Women around the World: A Quarterly Publication of the Center For Legislative Development*, April 2000, sighted at www.cld.org/waw5.htm on April 30, 2006.
- Caul, Miki. 2001. "Political Parties and the Adoption of Gender Quotas: A Cross National Analysis." *The Journal of Politics*, 63(4), pp. 1214-29.
- Chattopadhyay, Raghendra and Esther Duflo. 2004. "Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India." *Econometrica*, 72(5), pp. 1409-43.
- Childs, S. 2001. "Attitudinally Feminist?" *The New Labour Women MPs and the Substantive Representation of Women*, in *Politics*, 21(3), pp. 178-85.
- Dahlerup, Drude. 2002. *Using Quotas to increase Women's Political Representation. Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*. Stockholm: International IDEA.
- Dollar, David, Raymond Fisman and Roberta Gatti. 1999. "Are Women Really the "Fairer" Sex? Corruption and Women in Government." *Policy Research Report on Gender and Development, Working Paper Series, No. 4*. The World Bank.
- Duflo, Esther. 2005. "Why Political Reservations?" *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 3(2-3), pp. 668-678.
- Edlund, Lena and Rohini Pande. 2001. "Why have Women Become Left-Wing? The Political Gender Gap and the Decline of Marriage," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 117, pp. 917-61.
- Ghosh, D.K. 1995. "Women Panchayat Members as Heads of Offices: A Study in West Bengal," in *Journal of Rural Development* 14(4), pp.357-66.
- Htun, Mala. 2004. "Is Gender like Ethnicity? The Political Representation of Identity Groups." *Perspective on Politics*, 2(3), pp. 439-58.
- Htun, Mala and Mark Jones. 2002. *Engendering the Right to Participate in Decision-Making: Electoral Quotas and Women's Leadership in Latin America*. In *Gender and the Politics of Rights and Democracy in Latin America*, ed. Nikki Craske and Maxine Molyneux, 32-56. London: Palgrave.
- Hust, Evelin. 2002 "Political Representation and Empowerment: Women in the Institutions of Local Government in Orissa after the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution." Working Paper No.6, Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics.
- International IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance). 2006a. (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance). 2005. "Women in Parliament: Beyond Number, Obstacles to Women's Participation in Parliament," sighted at <http://archive.idea.int/women/parl/ch2b.htm> on Aug 28, 2006.
- International IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance). 2006b. "Women in Parliament: Beyond Number, Using Quotas to Increase Women's Political Representation," sighted at <http://archive.idea.int/women/parl/ch4a.htm> on Aug 28, 2006.
- International IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance). 2004. *The Implementation of Quotas: Asian Experiences*. International IDEA Quota Reports series by International IDEA.
- ISED (Institute for Socio-Economic Development). 1998. *Panchayat Raj and Women's Participation: A Stock Taking. A Case Study in Angul District. Orissa, Bhuvneshwar*.
- Jaquette, Jane. 2001. "Regional Differences and Contrasting Views." *Journal of Democracy*, 12(3), pp. 111-25.

- Jenkins, Laura Dudley. 1999. "Competing Inequalities: The Struggle over Reserved Legislative Seats for Women in India." *International Review of Social History*, 44, pp. 53-75.
- Jones, Mark. 2004. "Quota Legislation and the Election of Women: Learning from the Costa Rican Experience." *Journal of Politics*, 66(4), pp. 1203-33.
- Kapoor, N. 2002. "Women and Governance," in *Participation and Governance* Vol. 8, No. 23, March 2002, pp. 7-11.
- Kaushik, S. 1997. *Women Panches in Position: A Study of Panchayat Raj in Haryana*. New Delhi: Center for Development Study and Action.
- Lott, J.R. and L.W. Kenny. 1999. "Did Women's Suffrage Change the Size and Scope of Government?" *Journal of Political Economy*, 107, pp. 1163-98.
- Mansbridge, Jane. 1999. "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes'." *The Journal of Politics*, 61(3), pp. 628-57.
- MARG (Multiple Action Research Group). 1998. *They call me Member Saab: Women in Haryana Panchayat Raj*. New Delhi: MARG.
- Medha, K.L. 2001. "Local Government Conflicts of Interest and Issues of Legitimization," in *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, December 2001-28, 4702-04.
- Pai, S. 1998. "Pradhanis in New Panchayats: Field Notes from Meerut District," in *Economic and Political Weekly* 2, May 1998, pp. 1009-10.
- Pande, Rohini, 2003. "Can Mandated Political Representation Increase Policy Influence for Disadvantaged Minorities." *American Economic Review*, 93(4), pp. 1132-51.
- Phillips, A. 1995. *The Politics of Presence*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- PRIA (Participatory Research in Asia). 2001. *The State of Panchayats: A Participatory Perspective*, New Delhi, India.
- PRIA (Participatory Research in Asia) 2002. *Gender Paradigm in Local Governance*. Occasional Papers, No. 2, New Delhi, India.
- Raman, Vasanthi. 2002. 'The implementation of Quotas for Women: The Indian Experience', in *International IDEA The Implementation of Quotas: Asian Experiences*, Quota Workshop Report Series no. 1, Stockholm: International IDEA, pp. 22-32.
- Santha, E.K., 1999. *Political Participation in Panchayati Raj: Haryana Kerala and Tamil Nadu*. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.
- Singh, Hoshiar. 1994. "Constitutional Base for Panchayati Raj in India: The 73rd Amendment Act." *Asian Survey*, 34(9), pp. 818-827.
- Thomas, Sue. 1991. "The Impact of Women on State Legislative Policies." *Journal of Politics*, 53(4), pp. 958-76.
- Upadhyaya, K.K. 1998. "The political economy of reservations in public jobs in India, Implications for efficiency in public administration and equity in society." *International Journal of Social Economics*, 25(6/7/8), pp. 1049-63.
- Verba, Sidney, Nancy Burns, and Kay Lehman Schlozman. 1997. "Knowing and Caring about Politics: Gender and Political Engagement." *The Journal of Politics*, 59(4), November, pp. 1051-72.
- Waengerud, L. 2000. "Testing the Politics of Presence: Women's Representation in the Swedish Riksdag," in *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 23(1), pp. 67-91.