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CONTENTS

Sr. No.	TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)	Page No.
1.	THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF RISK ON ATTITUDE AND SUCCESS TOWARDS LIFE SATISFACTION OF MSME ENTREPRENEURS <i>DR. LATHA KRISHNAN & DR. T. J KAMALANABHAN</i>	1
2.	DETERMINANTS OF CAPITAL STRUCTURE IN NIGERIAN FIRMS: A THEORETICAL REVIEW <i>OWOLABI, SUNDAY AJAO & INYANG, UDUAKOBONG EMA</i>	7
3.	THE EFFICIENCY OF MARKET RISK DISCLOSURES IN JORDANIAN COMMERCIALS BANKS <i>DR. ADEL ANWAR YOUSEF SAID</i>	12
4.	CONTRIBUTION OF NON-MARKET WORKS IN BANGLADESH: CONSIDERING LOCATION, EDUCATION, FAMILY RELATION & MARITAL STATUS <i>DR. MD. AOULAD HOSEN</i>	17
5.	EMPIRICAL EVALUATION OF QUALITY EDUCATION EARNING'S POTENTIAL AND THEIR ROLE IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN PAKISTAN <i>DR. ABDUL QAYYUM KHAN & REHANA NAHEED</i>	24
6.	TOURISM: THE DEPTH OF ITS MEANING <i>PINKY PAWASKAR & DR. MRIDULA GOEL</i>	26
7.	MANAGEMENT OF DOMESTIC BIODEGRADABLE WASTE: A STUDY OF COMPOST PRACTITIONERS IN KOLHAPUR <i>DR. RAJENDRA BHUPAL PATIL</i>	33
8.	MANAGEMENT OF COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES THROUGH PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION UNDER JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT: A MICRO LEVEL ANALYSIS IN ODISHA <i>RAGHUNATH SAHOO & DR. MAMATA SWAIN</i>	38
9.	ECONOMIC VALUE ADDED PRODUCTIVITY OF MCL <i>DR. S. RAJAMOCHAN & DR. T. VIJAYARAGAVAN</i>	44
10.	DOES BANK CREDIT CAUSE ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE LONG-RUN? TIME-SERIES EVIDENCE FROM ETHIOPIA <i>K.SREERAMA MURTY, K. SAILAJA & WONDATERAHU MULUGETA DEMISSIE</i>	49
11.	CONSUMPTION PATTERN AND EXPENDITURE ELASTICITIES OF RURAL POOR HOUSEHOLDS IN PUNJAB <i>GURSHARAN KAUR & PARAMJEET KAUR DHINDSA</i>	57
12.	ORIGIN OF ECONOMETRICS <i>DR. RAJESHWAR SINGH</i>	62
13.	ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN PENNAR INDUSTRIES LTD. <i>DR. K. SELVI</i>	67
14.	AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON SOCIAL IMPACT OF SELF HELP GROUP MEMBERS IN KANCHIPURAM DISTRICT <i>DR. D. BASKAR & DR. K. SUNDAR</i>	70
15.	MANGALORE SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE – GROSS ROOT LEVEL REALITIES AND SEZs PROBLEMS <i>S.P. KIRAN & DR. D.V. GOPALAPPA</i>	79
16.	GENDER PERSPECTIVE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - A CASE STUDY OF HARYANA <i>RENU & DR. KARAN SINGH</i>	81
17.	FOOD SECURITY THROUGH THE MECHANISM OF PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM <i>DR. SATYAWAN BARODA & SARIKA SURI</i>	88
18.	RESOURCE CONVERGENCE IN 'PEOPLES PLANNING' BY WOMEN NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS AND PEOPLE'S ELECTED WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES: A CASE STUDY OF DECENTRALISED LOCAL SELF GOVERNANCE <i>DR. JOSEPH ABRAHAM</i>	92
19.	IMPACT OF RECESSION ON DIAMOND INDUSTRY IN INDIA: STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS <i>MUKESH R. GOYANI & DR. HEMANDRI TIKAWALA</i>	99
20.	COST-BENEFIT ASSESSMENT OF COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES (CPRS) IN RURAL WEST BENGAL: AN EVALUATIVE STUDY <i>DR. SWARUP KUMAR JANA & CHITTARANJAN DAS</i>	114
21.	ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AWARENESS AND ATTITUDE OF TOURISTS TOWARDS ECOTOURISM AND CONSERVATION IN KERALA <i>DR. P. R. SHINI</i>	119
22.	RISK MINIMIZATION TRADING STRATEGIES IN BULLISH MARKET <i>ANJALI CHOKSI</i>	123
23.	FARMER TO MARKET LINKAGES: REVAMPING UNDER THE EMERGING VALUE-CHAIN SYSTEM <i>DR. ARUN BHADAURIA</i>	136
24.	RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMERCIAL BANKS STOCK RETURNS AND MONETARY VARIABLES IN INDIA <i>SHINIL SEBASTIAN</i>	140
25.	FACTORS DETERMINING EMPOWERMENT OF GRAM PRADHANS IN BARABANKI DISTRICT OF UTTAR PRADESH <i>BHAVANA SINGH</i>	145
26.	ASEAN AND NORTHEAST INDIA: FODDER INDUSTRY IS A NOVEL PARADIGM SHIFT <i>DHANANJOY DATTA</i>	151
27.	CONTENTMENT ON DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES AMONG UNIVERSITY EDUCATORS: A CASE STUDY <i>S. M. DHANA SUNDARESWARAN</i>	156
28.	MEASURING FACTOR CONTENT OF INDIAN TRADE IN THE PRE AND POST LIBERALISATION PERIODS <i>DR. TUSHAR DAS</i>	162
29.	SUPPORTIVE MEASURES OF TOURISM PRACTICES: A STUDY OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR <i>VIKAS SHARMA, AMIT SHARMA & SHAFQAT AJAZ</i>	166
30.	CHANGING SCENARIO OF PUBLIC EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION: REVIEWING THE EXPERIENCE OF INDIA <i>PRABINA KUMAR PADHI</i>	170
	REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK	173

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FACTORS DETERMINING EMPOWERMENT OF GRAM PRADHANS IN BARABANKI DISTRICT OF UTTAR PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

In India, women constitute nearly half of the population and also contribute substantially in all walks of life. Majority of rural women suffer from economic as well as social problem. The analysis of data collected from the Gram Pradhans in selected blocks of Barabanki district indicates that in real term the empowerment of women is not very encouraging. Majority of elected women representative still lack awareness about various rural development programmes and their active participation in the decision making process and implementation of these programmes are very poor. Implementation of Panchayati Raj Act has helped the women in attaining economic and political empowerment to a large extent. Most of the women Gram Pradhans contested and won the election mainly with the support of husband and they were too much dependent on their husband for taking decisions. A very few of them earlier experience of any political activities are association with any political parties. The grass root realities indicate that still more have to be done and empowering the women through decentralization governance require active government support. However, it was found that a few of the experienced and educated women representatives played effective role in the development activities of villages.

KEYWORDS

Women empowerment, Decentralisation, Elected representatives.

INTRODUCTION

Women play an important role in the rural life and good governance through women's empowerment at the local level is expected to help in socioeconomic transformation of rural areas. But, the traditional Indian mentalities assume that the place of women is mainly concentrated to the household activities like kitchen work and upbringing of the children. They have not been given due status in the society because still the gender-sensitization has not percolated to the grass root level even after more than sixty years of independence. Still women are one of the most powerless and marginalized sections of Indian society. There is too much discrimination against rural women as they do not have secure rights to productive resources, specifically land while most of them are actively engaged in agriculture. But, it has been observed that still there is lack of adequate involvement of people at the grass root level and there is no transparency and leakages of funds provided for development. Empowerment is a political process and can be achieved through democratic decentralization and good governance (Ahmed et al. 1982; Collier Paul 1998). Women's empowerment can be measured by factors contributing to their personal, economic, familial, and political empowerment. Household and interfamilial relations are the central locus of women's disempowerment in India. Hence, women's empowerment measures should include women's participation in systemic transformation by engaging in political action (Batiwala 1994; Bisnath and Elson 1999; Kabeer 2001; Narasimhan, 1999; and Sen and Grown 1987; Amin, Becker and Bayes (1998).

The concept of women's empowerment can be split into three components each measured separately such as (1) Inter-spouse consultation index, which seeks to represent the extent to which husbands consult their wives in household affairs; (2) Individual autonomy indexes which represents women's self-reported autonomy of physical movement outside the house and in matters of spending money; and the Authority index, which reports on actual decision-making power (which is traditionally in the hands of the patriarch of the family). These indices are similar to those of used by Balk in her 1994 study. Comparable components of empowerment are included in the eight indicators by Hashemi (1996). These are mobility, economic security, ability to make small purchases, ability to make larger purchases, involvement in major decisions, relative freedom from domination by the family, political and legal awareness, and involvement in political campaigning and protests. For women in India, this suggests that empowerment in several realms: personal, familial, economic and political (Kabeer, 2001; Narayan Deepa (ed) 2002).

The effect of empowerment of women creates a powerful influence on the norms, values and finally the laws that govern these communities (Page and Czuba, 1999; George Abraham 2001). Individuals with low self-efficacy regarding their behavior limit their participation when making difficult behavior changes and are more likely to give up when faced with obstacles. Their efficacy beliefs about themselves serve as barriers to change, and in this case, their own empowerment (Hackett and Betz 1981). Furthermore, self-efficacy is not necessarily an in-born trait and can be acquired and nurtured. Bandura (1986) identifies four ways in which self-efficacy and self-efficacy expectations are acquired: *performance accomplishments*, *vicarious learning*, *verbal persuasion* and *physical/affective status*. *Performance accomplishments* are beliefs that stem from the reactions with which individual accomplishments are greeted. Bandura (1986) and Pajares (1996), indicate that a triadic relationship is necessary for change as there is a reciprocal relationship between 'personal factors', 'behavior' and 'environmental factors', which result in social change. Changes in personal factors (such as self efficacy) can affect an individuals' behavior (willingness to take risks), which can impact on environmental factors (family and society). A number of studies have shown that women may be empowered in one area of life while not in others (Malhotra and Mather 1997; Kishor 1995 and 2000b; Hashemi et al. 1996; Beegle et al. 1998).

OBJECTIVES

In this paper, an attempt has been made to examine the perception of rural women related to economic and political empowerment due to implementation of Panchayati Raj Act in Barabanki district of one of the largest state of India i.e. Uttar Pradesh.

RESEARCH METHOD

Analysis of data is based on the sample of 100 Gram Pradhans (comprising of 50 men and 50 women Gram Pradhans) out of 318 Gram Pradhans in five selected blocks of Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh. Details of selected men and women Gram Pradhans are given in Table 1. It is evident from Table 1 that out of total 318 Gram Pradhans in five Blocks, men Pradhan accounts for about 53 percent while women Gram Pradhan accounts for 47 percent. This shows that women Gram Pradhans are more or the less are equal number. Hence, equal number of Men and Women Gram Pradhans were selected for the study (Table 1).

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF SELECTED GRAM PRADHANS IN SELECTED BLOCKS OF BARABANKI DISTRICT OF U.P.

Particular	Selected blocks					
	Sidhaur	Masuali	Banki	Ramnagar	Haidergarh	Total
Number of Gram Pradhans						
Women	34	25	44	41	24	168
Men	41	23	18	28	40	150
Total	75	48	62	69	64	318
Number of selected Gram Pradhans						
Women	12	7	11	12	8	50
Men	15	7	7	9	12	50
Total	27	14	18	21	20	100

LEVEL OF FIRST CONTEST OF PRI ELECTION

More than 90 percent of women first contested the election of Gram Pradhan at village level while only 10 percent of them contested election at relatively higher level (Block level/tehsil level). In contrast, 75 percent men contested election of Gram Pradhan for the first time at the village level while 25 percent contested at the higher level i.e. Block or tehsil level. Response to question that what compelled them to seek election was quite different from different elected representatives. Most of the answers concentrate on the role of husband, women quota and villagers. Most of the elected members clarified that their husbands persuaded them to contest election and villagers backed it later on. However, there were different scenarios, in one case, the defeated Sarapanch candidate contested election after getting assurance from a political party that she with her husband will be paid daily wages, the day they will spend in the electoral activity. While another woman Sarpanch of the Panchayat narrated a different story. She indicated that 'Educated women should not sit idle at home' and this was the logic for her to contest election. For some, party has also some kind of influence behind their entry into politics (Tale 2).

TABLE 2: LEVEL AT WHICH THE FIRST CONTESTED PRI ELECTION

Particular	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Gram panchayat (village level)	75	90	83
Panchayat Samiti (block/ taluka level)	25	10	17
Zilla Parishad (district level)	-	-	-
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

AGE OF START OF POLITICAL CAREER

It was found that most of the women Gram Pradhan were never associated in campaigning/ electioneering/ politics/ issues of public concern. While a few of the men Gram Pradhan had earlier experience or partly associated with one or other political party for campaigning. However, the experience of actively participating in politics was not much. It was observed that more than 90 percent of women never actively participated in any electioneering or campaigning for any political party but a few of them (about 5 percent did participate at the age of 21 to 40 years). In contrast, about 20 percent of men Gram Pradhans and members of Panchayats started campaigning and participating in political activities in a limited way at the early age of less than 20 years. While a few (30%) of the men Gram Pradhans started participation in political activities at the age of 21 and rest 20 percent started at the age of 30 years. None of the men Gram Pradhans were active in political activities after the age of 60 years. In fact, very few men Gram Pradhans were of such age as they were more interested in assuming higher responsibilities above the village and district level (Table 3).

TABLE 3: AGE AT WHICH GRAM PRADHAN STARTED POLITICAL CAREER

Age group (Years)	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Not at all	30	90	60
Less than 20	20	-	10
21-30	30	5	18
31-40	10	5	17
41-50	10	-	5
50 and above	-	-	-
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

AGE OF CONTESTING OF PRI ELECTION

It was found that very few (less than 10 percent) men Gram Pradhans contested for Gram Pradhan at the age of less than 25 years. Most of the men and women Gram Pradhans contested election for the first time for the position of Gram Pradhan at the age of 26 to 45 years. This shows that most of Gram Pradhans were young and this is a welcome change that younger people have started taking the role of strengthening grass root democracy. A very few men contested the election of Gram Pradhan for the first time at the age of more than 50 years. In case of women it was nil as many of the women Gram Pradhans were daughter-in-laws or other family members of influential people who were playing greater role in politics at higher level (Table 4).

TABLE 4: AGE OF CONTESTING OF PRI ELECTION

Age group (Years)	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Less than 25	10	-	5
26-35	25	40	32
36-45	40	45	43
46-50	20	15	18
50-55	5	-	2
55 and above	-	-	-
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

FIRST TIME CONSTRAINTS

It was observed from Table 5 that a large number of both men and women Gram Pradhans faced resistance from caste and religion related problems while first time contesting the election of Gram Pradhan. This shows that dominance of caste and religion played a very important constraint in election of Gram Pradhans. However, a few (8% and 5%) of the men Gram Pradhans faced resistance from husbands/wife or other family members respectively. In contrast, more women (16% and 8%) faced resistance from husband and other family members respectively.

TABLE 5: MAJOR CONSTRAINTS FACED FIRST TIME WHILE CONTESTING PRI ELECTION

Particular	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Resistance from spouse/father	8	16	12
Resistance from other family members	5	8	7
Social taboo associated with female candidates	-	12	6
Prevailing <i>Parida</i> system	-	12	6
Constraints related to religion	20	16	18
Caste related resistance	25	28	27
Low education level	10	5	7
Political rivalry within same political group	12		6
Political rivalry from other political group	8		4
Lack of finance resources	12	3	7
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

Social taboos and Purdah system is also a major constraint in case of women while contesting election for the first time. Education was not a major constraint for election of Gram Pradhans. About 20 percent of the men faced political rivalry within and also from other political parties. However, since women were in general not associated with any political party they did not face such problems. About 12 percent of the men faced financial problems while contesting election for the first time while only 3 percent faced this problem as most of them were supported by their husbands or family members (Table 5).

OVERCOME OF CONSTRAINTS

Nearly half of the men Gram Pradhans and about 38 percent of women Gram Pradhans could overcome such constraints by convincing the husband or household members while contesting the election for the first time. Besides, 32 percent of women Gram Pradhans took help from women organisations for such facility. In contrast, about 16 percent of men Gram Pradhans took the help of local NGOs and could mobilize finances from friends and relatives. In case of women Gram Pradhans also 12 to 14 percent took the help of Self Help Groups (SHGs) and community based organisations (CBOs) to overcome such constraints (Table 6).

TABLE 6: OVERCOMING THE CONSTRAINTS WHILE CONTESTING ELECTION FOR THE FIRST TIME

Particular	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Convinced household members	52	38	45
Took help of women organization	-	32	16
Took help of Non Governmental Organisation (NGOs)	16	-	8
Took help of Self Help Groups (SHGs)	6	14	10
Took help of Community Based Organisations (CBOs)	8	12	10
Mobilized financial resources through relatives/friends/community	16	4	10
Convinced community members	2	-	1
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

MOTIVATION FOR PRI ELECTION

As regards the motivation to contest Gram Pradhan election is concerned, it was observed that more than one-fourth men Gram Pradhans were motivated on their own to contest election compared to only 12 percent women. In contrast, 25 percent of women Gram Pradhans were motivated/convinced/persuaded/forced to contest election of Gram Pradhan by their husbands and family members. Moreover, large number of parents and other family members motivated for contesting election of Gram Pradhan, especially in case of men (22%) compared to only 12 percent in case of women. In case of women about 22 percent were motivated by the government official as there was reservation for women. NGOs also played a major role in convincing both the men and women Pradhans to contest election of Pradhan. Other factors were not very important but they did play role in motivating the men and women for contesting elections of Panchayati Raj institutions (Table 7).

About the dependency of women Pradhans on husband, it was observed that in almost all cases the respective husbands had to be brought in even when there was a need for a member to sign papers. Response to question that whom do they give credit for winning election, it was again husband. This clearly shows that women Gram Pradhans and elected representatives were too much dependent on husband and therefore often the term 'Pradhan pati' is used for women Gram Pradhans. It was interesting to note that during visit to a few of villages when women Gram Pradhans were asked about Pradhan of the village, they indicated that he had gone to market or district headquarter while she herself was Pradhan. After reminding them seeing the name plate of Pradhan in the village she was ready to meet and discuss about her awareness about Panchayat and their role as well as participation in Panchayati Raj activities.

TABLE 7: MOTIVATION RECEIVED FROM VARIOUS SOURCES FOR CONTESTING PRI ELECTION

Particular	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Self motivated	26	12	19
Spouse	6	25	15
Parents/in-laws	22	12	18
Children	6	5	5
Other related family member	4	-	2
Friends	6	-	3
NGO/SHG	12	16	14
Government officials	8	22	15
Political party members	10	8	9
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

As relates to the previous political experience, 86% of Pradhans indicated that they had no previous political experience while 14% of the Pradhans said that they did have certain political experience (like one nominee addressed a political rally at district head quarter and two had some kind of organizational linkages). Moreover, it was also found that more than three-fourth of elected representatives felt satisfied with their respective Panchayat roles while about 60% expressed their readiness to contest next Panchayati Raj election. However, nearly 45% declined to stand for next Panchayati Raj election. The main cause of departing Panchayati Raj institution was not because of lack of their capacity but for factors beyond their immediate control. About 45 percent women gram Pradhans expressed the apathy of other male colleagues while 12 percent felt fear of public criticism (Table 7).

TYPE OF MOTIVATION

It was found that more than half (55%) the women gram Pradhans got motivated because of enforcement of reservation of women in the Panchayati Raj system while 16 percent of the women gram Pradhans also got motivated because there was reservation of weaker sections. Similarly, about 36 percent of men Gram Pradhans were motivated to contest election due to enforcement of reservation for weaker sections. About 16 percent of men gram Pradhans contested election due to social reasons while 18 percent were encouraged by various groups and committee members. About 10 percent of men Pradhans were influenced by the political affiliation of the family. In case of women Pradhans other factors were not very important. About 85 percent of the elected women leaders stated that they contested election due to pressure from their husband while a few of them indicated that they came in election fray on their own and claimed that they even would like to contest election even if there will be no quota system. Secondly, the villagers/husbands finalized the candidatures of many women gram Pradhans even during the absence of their wives. The ruling political party also finalized name of various defeated candidates for the post of the Sarpanch after assuring her that she would be compensated with daily wages during the campaign period. Moreover, a few of the candidates contested the election of Gram Pradhans got elected unopposed. This also indicates that a few women Gram Pradhans entered politics due to the compulsion of policy of reservation (Table 8).

TABLE 8: TYPE OF MOTIVATION FOR CONTESTING PRI ELECTION

Particular	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Incidence related to social cause	16	7	12
Incidence related to economic issue	8	6	7
Incidence related to law and order	12	8	10
Enforcement of women reservation	-	55	28
Enforcement of reservation for weaker section	36	16	26
Encouraged by group/committee members	18	3	10
Political affiliation of the family	10	5	7
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

MEMBERSHIP OF COMMUNITY

As regards the members of community organisation is concerned, more than 75 percent of men Gram Pradhans were members of some community organisation while only 54 percent of the women Gram Pradhans were members of any other community organisation. About 36 percent of male Gram Pradhans were members of Youth Club while 38 percent of women Gram Pradhans were member of Mahila Mandal. About 16 to 18 percent of men and women Gram Pradhans were members of cooperatives and education committee. Nearly one-fourth (26%) of men Gram Pradhans were members of Health committee while only 18 percent of women Gram Pradhans were members of such committees. But, about 10 percent of women Gram Pradhans were members of other committees while it was only 4 percent in case of men Gram Pradhans. This shows that women Gram Pradhans actively participated in village development committees (Table 9).

TABLE 9: MEMBERSHIP OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Member of community	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Yes	76	54	65
No	24	46	35
Type of Membership			
Youth club	36	-	18
Mahila mandal	-	38	19
Cooperative society	18	16	17
Village education committee	16	18	17
Health committee	26	18	22
Any other committee	4	10	7
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

CONTEST OF OTHER PRI ELECTION

It was found that about 90 percent of men and women Gram Pradhans did not contest any other Panchayati Raj election such as Block level (Nyaya Panchayat level) or district level than Gram Panchayat. It is to be noted that there was often change in the reservation of seats for weaker sections of the society and for women. Hence, most of the existing Gram Pradhans did not get chance to contest for the Gram Pradhan in the same village. During their political career 61 to 72 percent of men and women Gram Pradhans contested election of Gram Panchayat for the first time respectively. While about 28 and 34 percent of the men and women Gram Pradhans did contest PRI election twice during their political career. However, there were 5 percent male Gram Pradhans who did contest election of Gram panchayat for three times. Here, it is to be noted that most of selected men and women Gram Pradhans were of younger age and had no chance of contesting election for many times. It was also found that 58 and 76 percent of male and female Gram Pradhans did not contest Gram Panchayat election last time while 42 percent male and 26 percent female Gram Pradhans did contest last election of Gram panchayat but lost (Table 10).

TABLE 10: FREQUENCY OF CONTESTING PRI ELECTION

Particular	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Did they contest any other PRI Election (Block , District)			
Yes	12	5	9
No	88	95	91
How many times did they contest GP election in their political career?			
One	61	72	67
Two	34	28	33
Three	5	-	2
Four	-	-	
Did they contest the last GP election			
Yes, but lost the election	42	24	33
Not contested	58	76	67
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

HELP FROM ASSOCIATION

It was found that as expected membership of a association did not help much in contesting of election of Gram Pradhans. More than 85 to 86 percent of men and women Pradhans mentioned the same thing to the question whether membership of any association helped them in election of PRI or not. Only a small number of Gram Pradhans (15 %) indicated that becoming member of any association did help them in election of Gram Pradhan. A few of the important factors that helped them was increasing the interaction with local people, government officials and banks as well as increased mobility out side the household activity. However, interaction with Associations did increase their awareness about Panchayat's activity and helped them in developing leadership qualities (Table 11).

TABLE 11: HELP FROM ASSOCIATION IN ELECTION OF GRAM PRADHAN

Particular	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan	Both
Helped	15	14	15
Did not help	85	86	85
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)	100 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

REASONS FOR DEFEAT

There were many reasons for defeat in the last election and gram Pradhans who lost the election did mention multiple responses. In this case the total of percentage might not add to 100. About 43 percent of male Gram Pradhans mentioned that since seat was not reserved they could not contest election because there was conflict with other dominant caste/ religion groups and there was less acceptability across different social groups. A few (15%) indicated that there was no proper campaigning and in previous tenure they had some allegations and were involved in some scandals. Moreover, a few of them mentioned that during their last tenure they took some unpleasant decisions and had very less interaction with people. Also, they did not take up many development works. About 8 percent indicated that they did not have any political affiliation and also there was lot of rivalry between other political parties than within the political party (Table 12).

TABLE 12: MAJOR REASONS FOR DEFEAT IN ELECTION CONTESTED LAST TIME

Reason for defeat	Male Gram Pradhan	Female Gram Pradhan
Inadequate financial resource	25	34
Seat was not reserved	43	26
Unacceptability across different social category	25	46
Asked to contest from a different ward	13	10
Conflict with dominant caste/religion	23	11
No proper campaigning	15	14
Involved in scandals/allegations	12	5
Development work in last tenure was not sufficient	16	4
Less interaction with local people	26	12
Unpopular decisions taken during last tenure	12	4
No political affiliation	8	-
Political rivalry within same political group	9	-
Political rivalry from other political group	26	-
Total Gram Pradhan	50 (100)	50 (100)

Figures in parentheses are percentage to total

In case of women Gram Pradhans, major reasons stated for defeat (stated by 46%) was unacceptability by various social groups while 34 percent indicated that they did not have adequate financial resources to contest election. About one-fourth (26%) indicated that they did lost because seat was not reserved. However, about 10 percent of female Gram Pradhans indicated that they were asked to contest from other wards where they did not have enough support as 14 percent felt that there was no proper campaigning. However, it was interesting to note that there were only 5 percent women Gram Pradhans who faced some charges of scandals or allegations compared to 12 percent in case of men Gram Pradhans. Also, during the tenure of women Gram Pradhans more development work was done compared to tenure of men Gram Pradhans and very few of them took unpopular decisions. This shows that women Gram Pradhans were more efficient than men Gram Pradhans (Table 12).

CONCLUSION

The results of study show that active participation in politics of the women Gram Pradhan and most of the candidates for Gram Pradhan started their career early at the age of 25 to 40 years. More than three-fourth Gram Pradhan contested the election for the first time and many of them could not win the election second time mainly because during their tenure they took some unpleasant decisions and their constituency was changed and no adequate campaigning was made. However, a few of them could not win the election as they were not affiliated to any political party and could not get adequate financial as well as public support. Social taboos and Purdah system were a major constraint in case of women while contesting election for the first time. However, education was not a major constraint for election of Gram Pradhans. Nearly one-fourth men Gram Pradhans were motivated on their own to contest election while most of the female Gram Pradhans were motivated/ convinced/ persuaded/ pressurized to contest election by their husbands and family members. Government official as well as NGOs also played a major role in convincing female candidates, especially where the seat was reserved for them. Moreover, in almost all the cases the dependency of elected women Gram Pradhans was too much on their husbands. More than half of the women Gram Pradhans were motivated because of enforcement of reservation of women in the Panchayati Raj system while most of the men Gram Pradhans were motivated mainly because of social reasons, political affiliation of the family and encouraged by various groups and committee members. Majority of the male contestants faced financial problems while contesting election for the first time but a very few women candidates faced such problem as they were supported by their husbands or family members. Moreover, a few of the first time contestants could get financial support from Self Help Groups (SHGs) and community based organisations (CBOs). Majority of the Gram Pradhans were members of some community organizations but as expected membership of such associations did not help much in contesting of election of Gram Pradhans. Most of selected men and women Gram Pradhans were of younger age and had no chance of contesting election for many times. Majority of female Gram Pradhans did not contest Gram Panchayat election last time while nearly one fourth female Gram Pradhans did contest last election of Gram Panchayat but lost. The main reason for defeat was conflict with other dominant caste/ religion groups, less acceptability across different social groups, lack of proper campaigning, less interaction, rivalries between other political parties, unpleasant decisions, and some allegations due to involvement in scandals, etc. during their last tenure.

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