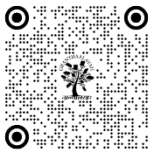


EVOLUTION OF PANCHAYATI RAJ IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The empowerment of women is a fundamental prerequisite for inclusive development and the deepening of democratic governance. In India, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 marked a transformative moment by mandating a minimum of 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), thereby promoting greater political participation of women at the grassroots level. This study explores the evolving role of women in the political landscape of Arunachal Pradesh, particularly through their engagement with PRIs. Drawing on a wide range of secondary data sources, including government reports, policy documents, and scholarly literature, the study employs basic statistical tools such as percentages to analyze trends and patterns over time. The findings demonstrate a consistent increase in women's representation across all three tiers of PRIs, reflecting both the impact of national policy reforms and the gradual shift in sociocultural attitudes within tribal communities. Despite ongoing challenges such as patriarchal norms, proxy leadership, and limited access to resources, women's political engagement in Arunachal Pradesh shows a clear upward trajectory. This progression signals a significant move toward gender-inclusive governance and highlights the critical role those institutional mechanisms, combined with community awareness, can play in empowering women as active agents of democratic change.

Keywords: Women's Political Empowerment, Legislative Reform, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Gender and Sociocultural Dynamics

1. INTRODUCTION

The empowerment of women stands as a fundamental pillar that underpins both inclusive development and the principles of democratic governance within societies. In the context of India, the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in the year 1992 represented a pivotal moment in the country's legislative history, as it instituted a requirement for a minimum of 33% reservation for women within the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), consequently enabling greater female representation and participation in governance at the grassroots level (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 1992). Within the unique sociocultural landscape of Arunachal Pradesh, a state that is home to a rich tapestry of tribal communities alongside deeply rooted patriarchal norms, the actualization of PRIs has significantly broadened the opportunities available for women to involve themselves actively in the political processes that govern their communities (Directorate of Panchayati Raj, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 2023). This study aims to delve into the multifaceted impact that PRIs have had on the political empowerment of women specifically in Arunachal Pradesh, thoroughly examining the advancements that have been achieved, the various challenges that have been faced along the way, and the strategies that can be employed to further enhance the involvement of women in the structures of local

governance. Through this exploration, the discourse will illuminate not only the successes that have emerged from these initiatives but also the ongoing hurdles that must be addressed to sustain and amplify women's roles in political decision-making. Ultimately, the findings presented will contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between policy, cultural dynamics, and gender empowerment within the context of local governance in this region.

Empowerment, as the word suggests, is to empower or enable women to undertake initiative to do certain things in political dimension. A deeper understanding of the word throws light on many of its dimensions and implications. The very concept of empowerment of women, which is based on equality between sexes, is a long drawn, conscious and continuous process – comprising enhancement of skills, capacity building, gaining self-confidence and meaningful participation in decision making (Rao, 2011).

Therefore, the commonly used statement holds cent percent true that the “The transformation of any society has to begin from women, because women are the centre of a family – the foundation stone on which the family is built. When a woman is changed, the family is changed and a change in the family brings changes in the society”. The impact of efforts by the state and the central government to eradicate poverty from the society, in spite of the better educational, economic, political cultural and social environment is minimal mainly because almost all the programmes are failed to include women in it. It is in this decade; the women empowerment policy (2001) and women empowerment policy (2010) have been introduced and women have become integral part of the development strategy (Directorate of Panchayati Raj, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 2023).

Rao (2011) pointed out that participation of women in political arena and in the decision-making role is an important tool for empowerment. The extent of this participation is monitoring standards of political performance at all levels. In India the participation of women in politics has been actually nominal since the days of freedom movement while in many other countries women are moving forward. Although their electoral participation has increased over the years, yet voting is only one aspect of political participation. In spite of a congenial political environment in the State, we find psychological obstacles, economic hurdles and socio-cultural barriers are restricting women's effective participation.

At the social level, Rao (2011) explained that the traditional outlook of the society and certain practical hurdles come in the way of women's participation, as it is a society in which the birth of a girl child is not welcomed and preference is for sons. Women are a victim of discrimination and subjected to inequality and her proper place is considered to be within the four walls of her home. On the other hand, factors like poverty, household work, child bearing and child-care make heavy demands on her time, energy and attention. Besides, patriarchal family norms, low level of informal and formal education, weak socialization process during childhood, home bound life and weak exposure to the outside world, adversely affect women's participation in politics. Those women who have got educated, means and ability to actively participate in politics are reluctant and indifferent because of the criminalization of politics, corrupt politicians, cost of elections and degenerating electoral practices (Rao, 2011).

1.1. OBJECTIVE

This study aims to critically examine the trends, challenges, and transformative effects of women's political participation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions of Arunachal Pradesh, with a focus on legislative milestones and sociocultural dynamics.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of secondary data. Relevant information was gathered from government reports, policy documents, academic journals, and statistical bulletins published by institutions such as the Directorate of Panchayati Raj, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, and the Reserve Bank of India. The research adopts a descriptive approach, employing simple statistical tools such as percentages to examine trends in women's representation across the tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions. The data primarily covers the period from the implementation of the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act (1997) to recent electoral cycles up to 2023. Tables and case studies are incorporated to facilitate clearer interpretation of patterns in women's political participation at the grassroots level.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The historical development of women's representation in Arunachal Pradesh's Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is a noteworthy reflection of both broad national policy directives and the complex sociocultural dynamics that are prominent at the local level. The following is an elaborately structured overview delineating this progression:

- 1) Pre-Constitutional Period (Before 1992):** During this era, traditional governance structures were predominantly in place, and Arunachal Pradesh, akin to numerous other tribal regions across India, was characterized by the existence of traditional tribal councils, such as the Kebang and Buliang, which were overwhelmingly male-dominated in their composition and functioning. Within the context of the councils that were established at that time, it became abundantly clear that the roles occupied by women in relation to formal decision-making processes were not only exceptionally limited but, in numerous instances, completely non-existent, thus effectively marginalizing their voices and contributions to the discussions and outcomes that were being generated. Moreover, it is of paramount importance to emphasize that during this particular historical period, the structured and formalized Panchayati Raj system had yet to be instituted, which consequently resulted in the absence of any organized mechanisms for local self-governance that would have enabled political participation or representation for women to occur in any meaningful or impactful way.
- 2) Post-73rd Constitutional Amendment (1992 Onwards):** In the aftermath of the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which took place in the year 1992, a significant transformation emerged within the landscape of local governance throughout the vast nation of India, as this legislation mandated the formation of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and included an essential provision that ensured 33% reservation for women, thereby fostering a climate of gender inclusivity within the political sphere. In the specific context of Arunachal Pradesh, the state undertook measures to implement the framework of PRIs in alignment with this pivotal legislative act; however, it is noteworthy that the adoption of such a system progressed at a notably slow pace, which can be attributed to a combination of geographical obstacles, administrative complexities, and social challenges that collectively hindered rapid advancements in this critical area (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2008; Tara & Kumar, 2015).
- 3) The establishment of PRIs in Arunachal Pradesh in 1994:** Following the establishment of this more comprehensive legislative framework aimed at improving local governance, the state government of Arunachal Pradesh took significant steps in 1997 to formally enact its own Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, a legislative initiative that successfully activated the operational framework required for the implementation of PRIs within the state. As a direct consequence of this legal reform, women were given a 33% reservation at all levels of Zilla Parishads, Anchal Samitis, and Gram Panchayats. This also signalled the start of women's involvement in local governance structures. It is crucial to acknowledge that women's early involvement in these governing bodies was often viewed as mainly symbolic or proxy-based. This is because, although many women were elected to these positions, their husbands or other male family members typically retained the actual decision-making authority, a phenomenon known in academic circles as the "sarpanch pati" phenomenon (Narayana, 2003).
- 4) Increasing Awareness and Involvement in the 2000s:** A distinct trend emerged as the timeline moved into the 2000s, highlighting the increasing participation of women as they progressively became more independent and active in their leadership roles within the Panchayat system, indicating a significant shift in their involvement. By raising women's capacity and awareness of their rights and responsibilities in the area of local governance, the interventions of various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government-led programs—particularly those focused on women's empowerment—significantly contributed to this revolutionary shift. A clear and noticeable shift began to occur, particularly among educated tribal women who were more willing to exercise their agency and voices in Panchayat-related issues, so contributing to the development of a more equitable political climate (NCRP, 2011; Sharma, 2017).
- 5) Post 50 percent increase (2010):** Following a 50% increase in 2010, women's involvement within Panchayati Raj institutions saw a significant improvement as a result of several Indian states raising the reservation for women to 50%. However, in Arunachal Pradesh the reservation provision under 73rd amendment of the constitution including the 50% reservation for women are not applicable, instead 1/3rd reservation system for

women continues to prevail. Also, by removing Anchal Samiti level from three tier system into two tier system under the new PRIs reform of 2018, no major policy change was marked against women and still significant advancement in the field of formal representation of women continued signaling a broader cultural shift that gave women more opportunities for recognition, empowerment, and authority within the governance landscape, thereby enabling a more inclusive and representative political environment as per the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Bill, 2018, Notification No. LA/Bill-5/2018 dated the 9th March, 2018 and the Bill was introduced in the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly on the 9th March, 2018.

- 6) Current Situation (2020s):** As we go into the 2020s, it becomes increasingly clear that there are more strong, competent women leaders actively involved in the two tier of PRI system, which helps to create a more representative and egalitarian form of government. The fact that some indigenous women have become powerful change agents and role models in their communities is another evidence of the advantages of more representation. However, it is undeniable that women's overall impact and involvement in PRIs are growing, suggesting a positive trend towards greater gender parity in local administration (Bora & Das, 2020). However, it is important to acknowledge that challenges still exist, such as deeply ingrained patriarchal mindsets, limited access to essential resources, and significant educational gaps. The significant turning points in Arunachal Pradesh's through women's PRI representation is shown in Table-1.

Table 1: Significant Turning Points in Arunachal Pradesh's Women's PRI Representation

Year	Event
1992	73rd Amendment Act passed at national level
1997	Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act enacted
1999	First Panchayat elections held in Arunachal Pradesh
2000s	Progressive increase in women's active participation
2023	Significant rise in women PRI leaders contesting and winning on merit

Source Directorate of Panchayati Raj-2013, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar.

Since the passage of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, which radically altered the structure of local government, there has been a notable change in the participation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the Arunachal Pradesh area.

This significant legal amendment required a 33% reserve for women in all local government institutions, with the main objective being to increase women's representation and active engagement in significant decision-making processes that affect their communities. The gradual but discernible rise in the proportion of women elected to positions within the three PRI levels—the district-level Zilla Parishad, the block-level Anchal Samiti, and the village-level Gram Panchayat—indicates that women's political participation in Arunachal Pradesh has been on the rise over time.

4. THE EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN PRIS OVER TIME

The first Panchayat elections, held in the month of April in 2003 under the newly established and modified electoral system in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, were followed by further elections in 2008 and 2013, each of which contributed to the development of the current discourse regarding women's political representation in this area. The results that emerged from these pivotal electoral processes have unearthed a decidedly encouraging trend that indicates a notable increase in the representation of women at various levels of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), which unmistakably reflects a substantial and positive shift towards fostering greater inclusivity and participation in the local governance structures that are essential for democratic engagement.

Women made up an impressive 39.60% of the elected representatives in the 2003 elections, especially at the Gram Panchayat level. This created a strong and positive basis for the expected future expansion of women's political participation in local government. Additionally, women made up 34.99% of all elected representatives in the Anchal Samiti, and 33.82% of all representatives in the Zilla Parishad. Taken together, these numbers represent a positive beginning towards significantly raising women's involvement and participation in government.

In the following election cycle in 2008, women's representation increased in a truly remarkable and noteworthy way. It was noted that women representatives made up an impressive 43% of all members elected to the Gram Panchayat, further solidifying their presence and influence in the local governance arena. Additionally, women's

representation in the Anchal Samiti rose significantly, making up 37% of the elected body. The favourable trend in women's electoral involvement during this election cycle is further evidenced by the fact that the proportion of female representatives in the Zilla Parishad also rose to 35%.

By the time the elections rolled around in the year 2013, the representation of women in the Gram Panchayat had ascended to an impressive 46%, while in the Anchal Samiti, women maintained a steady and consistent representation at 37%, and within the Zilla Parishad, the percentage of female representatives had risen to 38%, which collectively illustrates a sustained upward trajectory in women's involvement and participation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions over the years as evidenced by these electoral outcomes.

These statistical figures serve as compelling evidence of the gradual yet significant increase in women's participation at all tiers of the PRIs throughout the years, highlighting an encouraging trend towards gender inclusivity in local governance.

In contrast to several other states across the nation, it is noteworthy that the reservation percentage stipulated in the Panchayati Raj Act of Arunachal Pradesh is uniformly fixed at 33% for all levels of Panchayati governance, encompassing both the seats for members and chairpersons distinctly. It is, however, rather disheartening to observe that the leadership roles held by women within the Panchayat system have not transcended this predetermined percentage, suggesting limitations in the advancement of female representation in positions of power. The results of the most recent election held in May 2013 demonstrated these ongoing challenges, with the following outcomes:

Table 2 Results of the PRIs in May 2013

Zilla Parishad	Anchal Samiti	Gram Panchayat
Male:117, Female:60(33.89%)	Male:1192, Female:587(33%)	Male: 4969, Female:2447(33%)

Source Directorate of Panchayati Raj, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 2013.

Zilla Parishad: Of the elected officials, 60 were women and 117 were males, making up 33.89% of the total. 587 women, or 33% of the total, and 1192 men made up the Anchal Samiti. In conclusion, with 2447 women and 4969 men represented, women made up 33% of the Gram Panchayat. Let us say we want to utilise Kurung Kumey District's 2013 Panchayat Raj Elections as an example.

Case Study-1: Kurung Kumey District's 2013 Panchayat Raj Elections

Important details on the political participation of tribal women in local government institutions may be found in a thorough examination of the 2013 Panchayat Raj elections, particularly in the Nyapin block in Kurung Kumey district. Interestingly, two women were chosen to become members of Zilla Parishad, making up all of the group's members. In the Anchal Samiti, five women, or 29.41% of the total, were elected to the 17 seats that were up for grabs. Additionally, 30 women—representing an astounding 45.45% participation rate—were elected to the 66 seats in the Gram Panchayat. The political affiliations of these elected female representatives were varied and included the following distributions: 20 women, or 54.05% of the total, were elected by the Indian National Congress (INC), 11 women, or 29.73% of the total, were elected by the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA), and 6 women, or 16.22% of the total, were elected as independent candidates. This data illuminates the substantial presence of women within the framework of local governance and highlights their active participation across a variety of political platforms, demonstrating a critical shift in the political landscape of the region.

Case Study-2: Panchayati Raj Election 2020-2021 in Kamle District

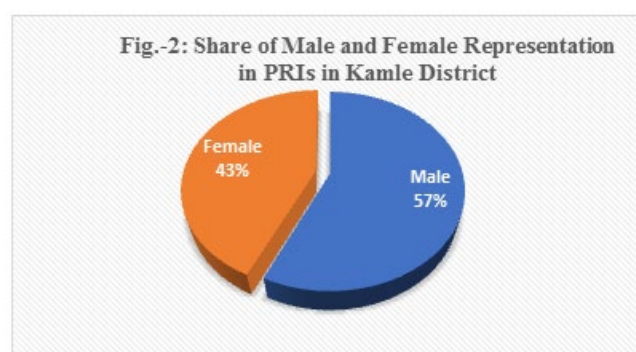
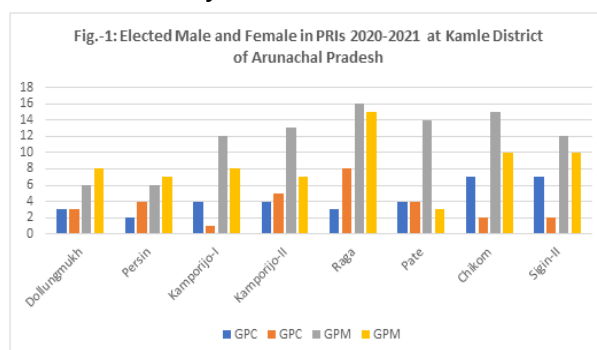
Again, we can present the recent results of Kamle District's 2020-2021 Panchayati Raj Election as an example to see the advancement of women in political dimension.

Table 3 Results of Panchayati Raj Local Bodies, Election 2020-2021, Kamle District

Constituency	GPC		GPM	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Tamen Dollungmukh	3	3	6	8
Persin	2	4	6	7
Kamporijo-I	4	1	12	8
Kamporijo-II	4	5	13	7
Raga	3	8	16	15
Pate	4	4	14	3

Chikom	7	2	15	10
Signin-II	7	2	12	10
Total	34	29	94	68

Source: Directorate of Panchayati Raj, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar. N.B.: GPC means Gram Panchayat Chairperson and GPM means Gram Panchayat Member.



Explanations of Table-3 and Fig.-1 and Fig.-2: In Table-3 and Fig.-1 and Fig.-2, we see that in every constituency, the females have participated in every post of election. Their participations i.e., elected females in GPC and GPM in every constituency are not very less than their counterpart, males seen in table-3. Their overall shares in PRIs are not very less than males. The females' share is 43 per cent PRIs election in 2020-2021 in Kamle District. It is seen in Fig.-2.

State-Level Involvement

Arunachal Pradesh had an impressive 9,383 representatives overall, 3,658 of whom were female, accounting for a noteworthy 39.0% of the total representation in these organisations, according to research published by the Reserve Bank of India on the participation of elected female members in PRIs.

At present i.e., in Panchayati Raj Election 2020-2021 under two tier Panchayati Raj System in the State, the overall percentages of women representatives for 2 tier PRIs are 35.70 per cent for ZPMs, 52 per cent for ZPCs, 43.66 per cent for GPMs and 50.50 per cent for GPCs.

REMARKS

The women of Arunachal Pradesh are going ahead in all respects. The share of women in every field of the State is approaching to equalize with male counterpart. In some fields the participation of women is higher than male. It means that the women are advancing and shouldering with their male counterpart in every space in the State.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, since the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act went into force, women's participation in Arunachal Pradesh's Panchayati Raj Institutions has significantly grown, allowing for a fundamental change in the dynamics of local government. The number of elected women in all three levels of PRIs has steadily increased over time, underscoring the importance of continued efforts to attain gender equality in grassroots political participation. This move is a step in the

right direction for inclusive government and the empowerment of women at the grassroots level. There is no any negative impact on women's participation in Post 2018 two tier system.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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