



Assessment of Women's Participation, Decision-Making and Governance Contributions in Panchayati Raj Institutions: Evidence and Constraints from Jammu and Kashmir After 2019

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Abstract:

This study examines women's participation, decision-making and governance contributions within Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Jammu and Kashmir after 2019, drawing strictly on the findings of a structured questionnaire and its respondent-level analysis. The findings indicate a generally positive assessment of grassroots institutional functioning, with 57.8% of respondents agreeing that PRIs effectively address local governance issues, while 40% considered their functioning well aligned with their constitutional role. The post-2019 period is associated with increased women's representation, with 60% of respondents expressing agreement that reservation policies have positively influenced women's participation, although perceptions of enhanced decision-making space remain comparatively moderate. Women's governance contributions emerge strongly in the findings: 62.2% agreed that women representatives have contributed to local development, while 62.2% also associated women's participation with improved transparency and accountability. At the same time, substantive participation remains constrained, as only 24.4% reported that women are always consulted equally with men in PRI decision-making, compared with 51.1% indicating that consultation occurs only sometimes. The findings further identify financial limitations, security concerns, political interference, family responsibilities, male dominance and community resistance as significant constraints on independent participation. Notably, 73.5% favoured legal safeguards against both proxy representation and political interference, while 57.1% supported regular and mandatory leadership training and 57.1% advocated significantly increased financial grants. The study therefore demonstrates a discernible movement from numerical representation towards participation, while highlighting the continuing need for institutional capacity-building, financial autonomy, administrative support, safety, and meaningful decision-making authority.

Keywords: Women's Participation; Panchayati Raj Institutions; Grassroots Governance; Decision-Making; Local Governance; Jammu and Kashmir

1. Introduction

1.1 Recasting Representation as Governance Participation:

The questionnaire findings indicate that the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Jammu and Kashmir is perceived relatively positively, while the depth of women's participation within these institutions remains more uneven. Regarding the effectiveness of PRIs in addressing local governance issues, 57.8% of respondents agreed that PRIs are effective, whereas 31.1% remained neutral, suggesting that although a majority recognises their functional relevance, a considerable proportion does not express an unequivocal assessment of their effectiveness. This institutional assessment becomes particularly significant when examined alongside women's participation in decision-making. The findings show that only 24.4% of respondents agreed that women's participation in PRI decision-making is adequately ensured, while 31.1% remained neutral, indicating that institutional presence does not automatically translate into consistently recognised decision-making influence. A similar pattern emerges in the assessment of women's post-2019 representation: 22.2% agreed and 15.6% strongly agreed that women's representation had increased following the constitutional changes. Thus, the



empirical evidence points toward an important distinction between women being represented within the PRI structure and their effective participation in its governance processes.

The findings further demonstrate that reservation has been perceived as an important mechanism for expanding women's participation, although its effects on substantive decision-making appear comparatively less conclusive. In the assessment of reservation policies, 48.9% of respondents agreed that reservation has positively influenced women's participation in PRIs, while 35.6% expressed a neutral position. Similarly, when respondents assessed whether women now possess greater space for decision-making than earlier, 33.3% agreed, suggesting some perceived expansion of women's institutional space, but not an overwhelming transformation in decision-making authority. Taken together, these responses establish an empirical progression from institutional inclusion to participatory possibility, rather than demonstrating a complete shift toward autonomous governance influence. The questionnaire therefore suggests that women's increased presence within PRIs and the positive contribution of reservation are recognised by respondents, but the comparatively restrained assessments of decision-making participation and expanded decision-making space indicate that representation remains only one dimension of effective grassroots governance. The central finding of this subsection is consequently that the institutional entry of women into PRIs is visible in the respondents' assessments, while the extent to which this presence translates into meaningful participation in governance and decision-making remains a continuing empirical concern.

Table 1.1: The Governance Entry–Influence Continuum: Respondents' Assessment of Women's Institutional Participation

Empirical Indicator	Response Category	Percentage	Analytical Reading
PRI effectiveness in addressing local governance issues	Agree	57.8%	Predominantly positive institutional assessment
PRI effectiveness in addressing local governance issues	Neutral	31.1%	Considerable reservation in institutional assessment
Women's participation in PRI decision-making	Agree (4)	24.4%	Moderate perceived decision-making participation
Women's participation in PRI decision-making	Neutral (3)	31.1%	Largest single neutral response
Women's representation after 2019	Agree (4)	22.2%	Perceived increase in representation
Women's representation after 2019	Strongly agree (5)	15.6%	Clear positive perception among a substantial group
Reservation positively influencing participation	Agree	48.9%	Strongest positive response category
Reservation positively influencing participation	Neutral	35.6%	Significant uncertainty/qualified assessment



Greater decision-making space after 2019	Agree	33.3%	One-third perceive expanded decision-making space
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Source: Questionnaire Findings and Analysis, Questions 9–14; respondent response distributions. Women’s participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Jammu and Kashmir reflects a gradual expansion of their institutional presence, although the findings indicate that representation has not yet translated uniformly into substantive decision-making authority. A majority of respondents, 57.8%, agreed that PRIs are effective in addressing local governance issues, while 24.4% reported that women are always consulted equally with men in PRI decision-making and 51.1% stated that such consultation occurs only sometimes. The findings further show a positive assessment of reservation, with 48.9% agreeing that reservation policies have positively influenced women’s participation, while 33.3% agreed that women now have greater space for decision-making than earlier. At the same time, the relatively limited proportion reporting consistent equality in consultation suggests that institutional representation and actual participation do not necessarily operate at the same level. The post-2019 experience also reflects a mixed pattern: 40.0% identified increased community acceptance as a major reason for women contesting elections more independently, while 35.6% associated this change with reservation support. Community acceptance itself was perceived to have improved slightly by 67.3% of respondents, whereas 51.0% considered post-2019 political empowerment to have improved only slightly. Taken together, these findings indicate that the institutional entry of women into PRIs has strengthened their visibility and participation, but the extent to which they exercise sustained influence within decision-making processes remains uneven.

1.2 The Post-2019 Participation Landscape:

The post-2019 participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions reflects a gradual strengthening of their electoral presence alongside a continuing process of social acceptance. The questionnaire findings indicate that 40.0% of respondents attributed women’s increased independent participation in elections primarily to greater community acceptance, while 35.6% associated it with reservation support; comparatively smaller proportions identified family support (13.3%) and party encouragement (11.1%) as the principal factors. This pattern is further reinforced by the finding that 67.3% of respondents perceived community acceptance of women leaders to have improved slightly after 2019, while 24.5% considered that it had improved considerably. These responses suggest that women’s participation has acquired greater social legitimacy, but the predominance of the “improved slightly” category indicates that acceptance has not developed uniformly into a strong and fully established social basis for women’s political leadership. The findings therefore point towards a participation process in which constitutional and institutional provisions have been accompanied by changing community attitudes, while family and political-party support remain comparatively less prominent factors in respondents’ assessments.

The transition from electoral representation to actual participation in decision-making, however, remains less consistent. 51.1% of respondents stated that women are consulted in PRI decision-making only sometimes, whereas 24.4% reported that women are always consulted equally with men, and 22.2% indicated that consultation occurs rarely. The findings on political empowerment after 2019 similarly reveal a qualified rather than unequivocal change: 51.0% perceived only a slight improvement in women’s political empowerment, compared with 42.9% who identified stronger political empowerment. The open-ended responses reinforce this distinction by repeatedly emphasising meaningful participation, independent decision-making, leadership training, financial support, safety, administrative knowledge and institutional support as priorities for strengthening women’s leadership. Several respondents specifically stressed that women should be able to manage official responsibilities independently and participate meaningfully in PRI decisions rather than remain confined to numerical representation. Thus, the post-2019 findings reveal an important distinction between women’s increased institutional presence and the consistency of their actual participation: electoral and social acceptance

appear to have improved, but equal consultation and substantive decision-making authority remain areas requiring further strengthening.

Table 1.2: Post-2019 Participation Shift: Representation, Acceptance and Decision-Making Access

Dimension	Dominant Response	Percentage	What the Finding Indicates
Independent electoral participation after 2019	Increased community acceptance	40.0%	Social acceptance identified as the leading factor
Independent electoral participation after 2019	Reservation support	35.6%	Reservation remains a major enabling factor
Independent electoral participation after 2019	Family support	13.3%	Family support plays a secondary enabling role
Independent electoral participation after 2019	Party encouragement	11.1%	Party encouragement is comparatively less prominent
Consultation in PRI decision-making	Sometimes	51.1%	Participation is present but not consistently equal
Consultation in PRI decision-making	Always equally as men	24.4%	Only about one-fourth report consistent equality
Consultation in PRI decision-making	Rarely	22.2%	A substantial minority experience limited consultation
Community acceptance after 2019	Improved slightly	67.3%	Incremental rather than dramatic social acceptance
Community acceptance after 2019	Improved a lot	24.5%	Strong improvement reported by roughly one-fourth
Post-2019 political empowerment	Slight improvement only	51.0%	Majority perceive limited rather than transformative improvement

Source: Questionnaire Findings and Analysis, Questions 26–28 and 41.

The findings indicate that the post-2019 participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has gained greater social and institutional acceptance, but the transition from representation to substantive participation remains uneven. 40.0% of respondents identified increased community acceptance as the main reason for women contesting elections more independently, followed by 35.6% who attributed this to reservation support, while family support (13.3%) and party encouragement (11.1%) were comparatively less significant. Community acceptance was perceived to have improved slightly by 67.3% of respondents and improved considerably by 24.5%, indicating a broader social opening for women's political participation. However, this increased acceptance does not correspond uniformly



with equal access to decision-making, as 51.1% reported that women are consulted only sometimes, while only 24.4% stated that they are always consulted equally with men and 22.2% reported rare consultation. A similar pattern appears in perceptions of political empowerment after 2019, with 51.0% reporting only slight improvement compared with 42.9% identifying stronger political empowerment. Taken together, these responses suggest that the institutional expansion of women's participation has been accompanied by greater community acceptance, yet the depth and consistency of women's involvement in PRI decision-making remain comparatively limited.

2. Empirical Architecture of Women's Governance Contributions

2.1 Governance Footprints: Development, Welfare and Community Responsiveness

Women's contribution to local governance emerges strongly in the areas of development, accountability and community-oriented administration. 62.2% of respondents agreed that women leaders have contributed significantly to local development, covering areas such as healthcare, education, sanitation and livelihood, while an identical 62.2% agreed that women's leadership has increased transparency and accountability within PRIs. Although the response regarding responsiveness to community needs was comparatively more moderate, 44.4% of respondents agreed that women leaders are more responsive to community needs than their male counterparts. The findings on specific areas of contribution provide further substance to this assessment: 63.3% identified education as the area receiving greater priority from women leaders, while 26.5% identified healthcare. Similarly, 61.2% of respondents considered social development, including schools and health-related concerns, as the area in which women leaders had contributed most, compared with 14.3% identifying civic services. These responses indicate that women's perceived governance contributions are particularly visible in socially oriented and community-facing areas, with education and broader social development occupying a prominent position in respondents' assessments.

The findings concerning welfare delivery and community participation further indicate that women's role extends beyond formal representation to activities directly connected with local service delivery and public engagement. 55.1% of respondents reported that women PRI leaders had improved welfare-scheme delivery across all of the identified areas—healthcare, education and employment/livelihood. In relation to community participation, 49.0% selected all identified mechanisms, including regular meetings, transparency and the involvement of women's groups or self-help groups, while 28.6% specifically highlighted the involvement of women's groups and SHGs. When considered alongside the 62.2% agreement regarding transparency and accountability and the 44.4% agreement regarding responsiveness to community needs, the findings suggest that women representatives are perceived to contribute most visibly where governance involves social development, welfare implementation, accountability and direct engagement with community concerns. The empirical pattern therefore points to a broadening of women's governance contributions across development and welfare functions, rather than their participation being confined solely to occupying elected positions.

Table 2.1: Mapping the Governance Footprint: Women Representatives' Perceived Contributions Across Local Development

Governance Dimension	Leading Response	Percentage	Empirical Significance
Contribution to local development	Agree	62.2%	Strong positive perception
Transparency and accountability	Agree	62.2%	Strong perceived governance contribution

Responsiveness to community needs	Agree	44.4%	Positive perception, though less pronounced
Welfare-scheme delivery	All of the above	55.1%	Broad-based welfare contribution
Priority area	Education	63.3%	Most prominent development priority
Priority area	Healthcare	26.5%	Second-most identified priority
Major contribution	Social development	61.2%	Dominant contribution domain
Major contribution	Civic services	14.3%	More limited reported emphasis
Community participation mechanism	All of the above	49.0%	Multiple participatory mechanisms perceived
Community participation mechanism	Involving women's groups/SHGs	28.6%	Significant role of collective participation

Source: Questionnaire Findings and Analysis, Questions 15–17 and 29–32.

The empirical pattern in the table indicates that women representatives are perceived to make tangible contributions to local governance, particularly through development-oriented, welfare-related and community-responsive functions. 62.2% of respondents agreed that women leaders have contributed significantly to local development, while the same proportion (62.2%) associated women's leadership with increased transparency and accountability in PRIs. Although the assessment of responsiveness was comparatively moderate, 44.4% agreed that women leaders are more responsive to community needs than their male counterparts. The sectoral responses further indicate that education received the highest priority, identified by 63.3% of respondents, followed by healthcare at 26.5%, while 61.2% identified social development as the area of women's greatest contribution. In relation to welfare administration, 55.1% reported improvements across healthcare, education and employment/livelihood collectively. Similarly, 49.0% considered the combined use of regular meetings, transparency and involvement of women's groups or SHGs to be the principal means through which women leaders encourage community participation, while 28.6% specifically identified women's groups and SHGs. Taken together, these findings suggest that women's contribution within PRIs is most visible in socially oriented development, welfare delivery, transparency and community engagement, indicating a substantive governance footprint extending beyond their formal numerical representation.

2.2 Constraint Matrix: Resources, Institutions and Social Barriers

The findings reveal that women's effectiveness within Panchayati Raj Institutions continues to be shaped by a combination of financial, security, political and socio-cultural constraints. 44.4% of respondents agreed that women in PRIs face socio-cultural barriers and gender-based discrimination, while 51.1% agreed that inadequate financial resources restrict the effectiveness of women leaders. Security and conflict-related concerns were identified as a significant limitation by 55.6%, and 53.3% agreed that political interference weakens the role of women leaders. The responses concerning family responsibilities further indicate that these responsibilities frequently affect women's active participation, with 51.0% reporting that they restrict women's role often. The issue of independent decision-making is particularly revealing: 38.8% identified male family dominance as the principal reason for limited independence, followed by 34.7% identifying community resistance and 18.4%



political-party influence. Moreover, 55.1% of respondents stated that male dominance affects women leaders moderately, while 22.4% perceived its effect as strong. These responses collectively indicate that women's formal presence in PRIs operates within a wider environment where control over resources, family influence, social expectations, political intervention and security concerns can restrict the extent of their independent participation.

Institutional capacity and administrative support also emerge as important areas of concern in the responses. 66.7% of respondents considered existing training and orientation programmes for PRI members to be only partially sufficient, while 64.4% regarded coordination between PRIs and higher government bodies as somewhat effective, suggesting that institutional linkages exist but are not perceived as fully effective. The demand for stronger support is reinforced by the recommendations: 57.1% favoured regular and mandatory leadership training for women PRI members, while an equal 57.1% supported a significant increase in financial grants. In addition, 73.5% favoured legal safeguards addressing both proxy representation and political interference. The open-ended responses repeatedly called for leadership and administrative training, financial autonomy, greater decision-making authority, safe working conditions, institutional support, administrative knowledge and mechanisms to enable women to participate independently. The evidence therefore indicates that the constraints facing women representatives are not confined to social attitudes alone; they also involve the availability of resources, training, institutional coordination and safeguards necessary for women to exercise their responsibilities with greater independence.

Table 2.2: The Constraint Matrix: Institutional Capacity, Social Barriers and Administrative Dependence

Constraint / Capacity Dimension	Dominant Response	Percentage	Administrative Implication
Socio-cultural barriers/gender discrimination	Agree	44.4%	Persistent social constraint
Financial resources limiting effectiveness	Agree	51.1%	Resource limitations affect perceived effectiveness
Security/conflict issues limiting participation	Agree	55.6%	Security remains a significant participation constraint
Political interference weakening women's role	Agree	53.3%	External political influence remains significant
Family responsibilities restricting participation	Often	51.0%	Domestic responsibilities remain a recurrent constraint
Cause of limited independent decision-making	Male family dominance	38.8%	Most frequently identified constraint
Cause of limited independent decision-making	Community resistance	34.7%	Social resistance is also substantial



Male dominance affecting women leaders	Moderately	55.1%	Predominantly moderate perceived influence
Training/orientation	Partially sufficient	66.7%	Capacity-building remains incomplete
PRI–higher government coordination	Somewhat effective	64.4%	Coordination exists but is not perceived as fully effective

Source: Questionnaire Findings and Analysis, Questions 18–25 and 33–35.

The findings reveal that women's effectiveness within Panchayati Raj Institutions is shaped by a combination of institutional limitations, resource constraints and persistent social influences. 51.1% of respondents agreed that inadequate financial resources restrict the effectiveness of women leaders, while 55.6% agreed that security and conflict-related issues limit women's participation and 53.3% considered political interference a factor weakening their role. Socio-cultural barriers and gender discrimination were also identified, with 44.4% agreeing that such barriers continue to affect women in PRIs, while family responsibilities were reported as frequently restricting women's active participation by 51.0% of respondents. The problem of independent decision-making is particularly evident, as 38.8% identified male family dominance and 34.7% community resistance as major reasons for limited autonomy; moreover, 55.1% stated that male dominance affects women leaders to a moderate extent. Institutional capacity also remains incomplete, with 66.7% considering existing training and orientation programmes only partially sufficient, while 64.4% regarded coordination between PRIs and higher government bodies as only somewhat effective. Taken together, these responses indicate that women's formal presence in PRIs operates within a wider administrative environment where access to financial resources, security, training, inter-governmental coordination and independent authority remains uneven, while family influence, political intervention, male dominance and community resistance continue to shape the practical scope of women's leadership.

3. Discussion:

The findings indicate that the expansion of women's institutional representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions has not translated proportionately into consistently equal participation in decision-making. While reservation and increased representation have established women's formal presence within local governance, the finding that 51.1% of respondents reported that women are consulted only sometimes, compared with 24.4% who reported that women are always consulted equally, points towards a continuing representation–participation gap. At the same time, the evidence demonstrates that women's participation is associated with recognised governance contributions: 62.2% of respondents agreed that women contribute to local development, an identical 62.2% recognised their contribution to transparency and accountability, and 44.4% acknowledged their contribution to responsiveness. These findings reveal a governance contribution paradox in which women are perceived as making meaningful contributions while simultaneously operating within conditions shaped by financial limitations, political interference and security concerns. The coexistence of contribution and constraint suggests that women's institutional participation has acquired substantive relevance, but its effectiveness and consistency remain conditioned by the environment in which representatives exercise their roles. Consequently, formal authority alone cannot adequately explain the extent of women's participation; the findings indicate that the quality of participation is closely connected with the administrative support, institutional resources and decision-making conditions available to representatives.

The findings further demonstrate that the question of participation is inseparable from administrative capacity and autonomy. 66.7% of respondents considered existing training and orientation only partially sufficient, while 57.1% supported regular and mandatory leadership training and an identical 57.1%



favoured significantly increased financial grants, indicating a clear demand for stronger institutional and resource-based support. At the same time, the constraints identified in the findings operate through overlapping rather than isolated influences: 38.8% identified male family dominance, 34.7% identified community resistance, 53.3% agreed that political interference constitutes a constraint, 55.1% reported a moderate effect of male dominance, and 51% indicated that family responsibilities often affect participation. Together, these findings suggest that the autonomy of women representatives is shaped by interconnected familial, social and political influences that can affect their independent exercise of institutional authority. The direction emerging from the respondents is therefore not limited to maintaining representation through reservation but points towards administrative enablement: 73.5% favoured legal safeguards against both proxy representation and political interference, while 49% supported a combination of awareness campaigns, media coverage and school/community education for grassroots gender sensitivity. The open-ended responses reinforce this direction through repeated emphasis on training, financial support, meaningful decision-making, safety, administrative knowledge, mentorship, digital literacy and institutional support. Taken together, the findings point towards a transition from reservation-led representation to capacity-enabled and institutionally supported participation, in which women's presence in local governance is strengthened through the administrative capabilities, resources, autonomy and institutional safeguards necessary for meaningful decision-making.

Conclusion:

The empirical evidence indicates that women's institutional inclusion in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Jammu and Kashmir has expanded after 2019, although this expansion remains uneven. The findings demonstrate that representation and participation cannot be treated as synonymous, particularly when a substantial proportion of respondents report that women are consulted only sometimes. At the same time, women's governance contributions are visible in areas including social development, education, welfare delivery, transparency and accountability, indicating that their presence within local institutions has acquired substantive administrative relevance. Thus, the evidence reflects a gradual movement from representation towards participation, although the transition into consistent decision-making remains incomplete.

The findings further establish that the quality of women's administrative participation continues to be shaped by financial limitations, security concerns, political interference, family responsibilities, male dominance and community resistance. Consequently, the next administrative frontier lies in strengthening the institutional conditions under which representation can produce autonomous and meaningful participation. Regular leadership training, stronger financial support, gender-sensitivity initiatives and legal safeguards against proxy representation and political interference emerge directly from the findings as important areas of institutional support. Overall, the evidence reflects a progression from representation to participation towards decision-making, with women's governance contributions remaining conditioned by the institutional and social constraints within which Panchayati Raj governance operates.

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