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Profile and constitutional governance knowledge of women sarpanch: An empirical study of Navsari district of Gujarat

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Abstract

Women's participation in grassroots governance has increased significantly following the constitutional provisions for reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). However, the effectiveness of women leaders largely depends on their understanding of constitutional governance and institutional functions. The present study was conducted in Navsari district of South Gujarat to assess the profile characteristics of women sarpanch, determine their knowledge regarding the fundamental functions of constitutional bodies and examine the relationship between selected profile variables and knowledge level. A total of 100 women sarpanch were selected through proportionate random sampling from six talukas of the district. Data were collected using a pre-tested interview schedule and analysed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The findings revealed that the majority of respondents were middle-aged (65.00%), had secondary-level education (58.00%), belonged to OBC communities (39.00%), lived in joint families (57.00%) and were engaged in farming along with animal husbandry (51.00%). Most respondents exhibited moderate levels of mass media exposure (55.00%), political contact (62.00%), management orientation (71.00%) and knowledge regarding the fundamental functions of constitutional bodies (61.00%). Correlation analysis indicated that education, mass media exposure, age, social participation, family size and management orientation were positively and significantly associated with knowledge levels. The study highlights the importance of educational attainment, information access and social engagement in enhancing constitutional governance awareness among women sarpanch. Strengthening capacity-building initiatives and governance-oriented training programmes can further improve the effectiveness of women leaders in local self-government institutions.

Keywords: Panchayati raj institutions, constitutional governance, knowledge level, women sarpanch

Introduction

India is the world's largest democracy, where power lies with the people through their right to vote and elect their representatives. Balwant Rai G. Mehta (1957) realized that people's participation is crucial for successful implementation of programs like Community Development Program and National Extension Services (Harikrishna *et al.*, 2023). The state of Madras had started democratic decentralization as an experimental measure in his own way as early as 1957, which was further followed by other Indian states like Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. Nagaur in Rajasthan became the first district to fully adopt democratic decentralization in India (Anon., 2003). The concept of "democratic decentralization" was difficult for the general public to understand during that period. Therefore, the three-tier administrative structure was later termed as "Panchayati Raj," referring to a decentralized system of local self-government. In this framework, the Zila

Panchayat functions at the district level, Panchayat Samiti operates at the block level and Gram Panchayat serves as the village-level governing body. (Parmar *et al.*, 2025) ^[5]. As a result of this constitutional amendment in 1992, whole world witnessed a significant development in the realm of Indian democracy. The greatest feature of new Panchayati Raj Act 1992 is 33 per cent reservation seats for women. Article 243-D says that "Not less than one-third of total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women".

Strong leadership at the grassroots level plays a vital role in ensuring effective governance in rural communities. The success of local self-governance in India largely depends on the performance of elected representatives in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), which serve as the backbone of rural administration (Parmar *et al.*, 2025) ^[5]. Status of woman can be assessed in different ways like the extent of a women's access to social and material resources within the sphere of

family, community and society. The extent to which women have access to knowledge, economic resources and political power as well as the degree of autonomy she enjoys in decision-making and making personal choices at crucial points in her life-cycle also determines her status.

The role performance of women panchayat leaders is very important in developing agricultural, social, economic and political level of rural mass. The success of any gram panchayat largely depends upon how well the selected members and sarpanch perform their roles within the framework of Panchayat Raj constitution. It is necessary for the sarpanch and member of the gram panchayat to have knowledge and clear understanding of their roles and its effective implementation for the development of village.

Political participation of women not only using the right to vote, but also power-sharing co-decision-making and co-policy-making at all levels of governance of the state. Now, women slowly moving towards the leadership scale and changing the face of village politics by giving new directions to the empowerment, highlighting their problems and finding solutions to make it successful. Elected women representatives are slowly bringing change in the rural countryside and urban areas, by bringing social development.

Although several studies have examined the socio-economic characteristics, leadership roles, empowerment and performance of elected women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions, limited empirical evidence is available regarding their knowledge of the fundamental functions of constitutional bodies. Most existing research has focused on participation and decision-making aspects rather than assessing constitutional governance awareness among women sarpanch. Furthermore, studies investigating the influence of personal, socio-economic, communication

and psychological characteristics on constitutional knowledge are scarce, particularly in the context of South Gujarat. The present study addresses this gap by systematically evaluating the knowledge level of women sarpanch regarding constitutional bodies and identifying the factors associated with such knowledge, thereby contributing to a better understanding of governance capacity at the grassroots level.

Objectives

1. To study the profile of women sarpanch
2. To study the knowledge level of women sarpanch about fundamental functions of constitutional bodies
3. To study the association between profile of women sarpanch with knowledge level about fundamental functions of constitutional bodies

Research Methodology

The study was conducted in Navsari district of South Gujarat. In Navsari district, there are six talukas viz. Navsari, Gandevi, Chikhli, Jalalpore, Vandsa and Khergam. All six talukas were selected for present study. The list of gram panchayats headed by women sarpanch was collected from district panchayat, Navsari. Total 168 gram panchayats of Navsari district are headed by women sarpanch. According to the number of gram panchayats headed by women sarpanch in each taluka, 100 villages were selected with proportionate random sampling. Thus, total 100 villages were selected from Navsari district. The data collected using pre tested interview schedule was compiled, tabulated and analysed using Microsoft Excel according to the objectives. Statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and coefficient of correlation were used to derive meaningful conclusions.

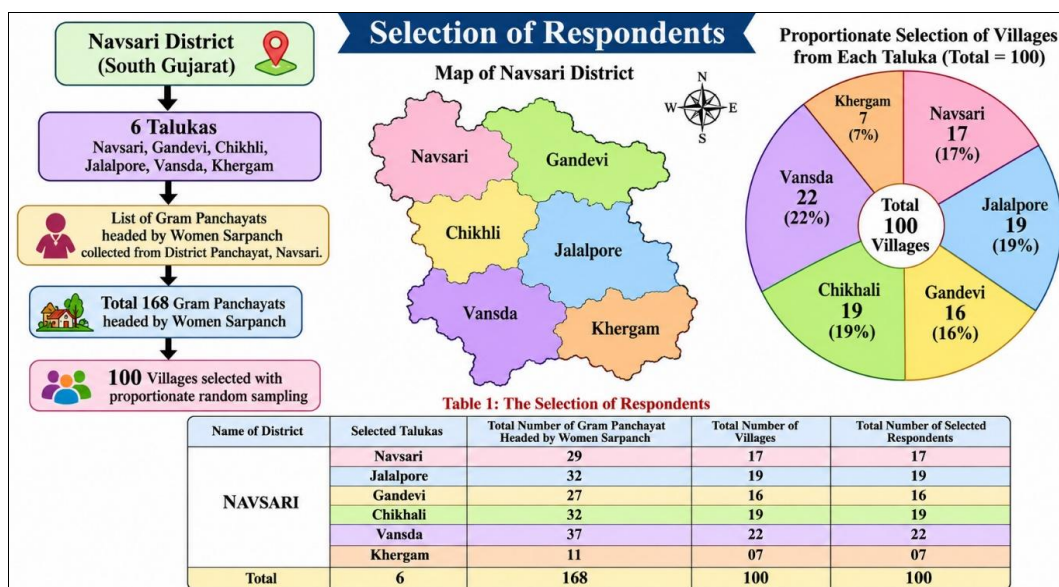


Fig 1: Selection of Respondents

Results and Discussion

Profile of women sarpanch of gram panchayat

It is clear from the table 1 that 65.00 per cent of the women sarpanch were belonged to middle age group while 18.00 per cent were belonged to old age group and nearly same

17.00 per cent were belonged to young age group.

It is clear from the data that almost two third of respondents (65.00 per cent) were in middle age category. The results indicate that they have enough maturity to take responsibility of being a sarpanch.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to age (n=100)

Sr. No.	Categories of age	Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Young	17	17.00
2	Middle	65	65.00
3	Old	18	18.00
	Total	100	100.00

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to caste (n=100)

Sr. No.	Categories of caste	Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	ST/SC	36	36.00
2	OBC	39	39.00
3	GENERAL	25	25.00
	Total	100	100.00

It is clear from the data indicated in the table 2 that 39.00 per cent of the respondents are belonged to OBC category and nearly same 36.00 per cent of them belonged to ST/SC and 25.00 per cent of the respondents are belonged to general category.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to education (n=100)

Sr. No.	Categories of education	Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Primary	13	13.00
2	Secondary	58	58.00
3	College and above	29	29.00
	Total	100	100.00

It is apparent from the table 3 that about 58.00 per cent of the respondents had secondary level of education followed by 29.00 per cent of the respondents had high level of education and only 13.00 per cent had low level of education.

In general, slightly more than half of respondents (58.00 per cent) had secondary level of education. The main reason behind this is supposed to that now a days people understand the important of education for girl child also so it would increase from secondary to college level education.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to family type (n=100)

Sr. No.	Categories of family type	Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Nuclear	43	43.00
2	Joint	57	57.00
	Total	100	100.00

It is clear from the data indicated in the table 4 that 57.00 per cent of the respondents were living in joint family and 43.00 per cent of them were living in nuclear family It showed that respondents were living in joint family. Main reason for this is supposed to our traditional culture.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents according to family size (n=100)

Sr. No.	Categories of family size	Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Small	26	26.00
2	Medium	60	60.00
3	Large	14	14.00
	Total	100	100.00

The data presented in table 5 revealed that 60.00 per cent of the respondents belonged to category of medium family followed by 26.00 per cent and 14.00 per cent who were in small and large family categories, respectively. In general, from the above finding it could be said that majority of the respondents (86.00 per cent) belonged to medium to small family categories.

Table 6: Distribution of respondents according to occupation (n=100)

Sr. No.	Categories of occupation	Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Farming alone	45	45.00
2	Farming + Animal husbandry	51	51.00
3	Farming + Animal husbandry + Service	04	04.00
	Total	100	100.00

The table 6 show that half of the respondents (51.00 per cent) were having farming + animal husbandry as major occupation and nearly same 45.00 per cent had farming alone as occupation and 04.00 per cent of them had farming + animal husbandry + service. In general, the half of the respondents (51.00 per cent) had farming + animal husbandry as major occupations. The probable reason may be that the respondents have considered these two as helpful to sustain their livelihood and lack of other opportunity may restrict them to go for any other supplementary income.

Table 7: Distribution of respondents according to land holding (n=100)

Sr. No.	Categories of land holding	Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Small	75	75.00
2	Medium	20	20.00
3	Large	05	05.00
	Total	100	100.00

It is evident from table 7 that majority of the respondents (75.00 per cent) belonged to small land holding category followed by 20.00 per cent belonged to medium land holding category and only 05.00 per cent were belonged to large land holding category. In general, it could be said that majority (75.00 per cent) of the respondents were having small land holding. The possible reason of this finding might be due to more land fragmentation among family members.

Table 8: Distribution of respondents according to annual income (n=100)

Sr. No.	Categories of annual income	Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Low	44	44.00
2	Medium	48	48.00
3	High	08	08.00
	Total	100	100.00

The data presented in table 8 indicated that 48.00 per cent of the respondents belonged to medium annual income category nearly same 44.00 per cent and belonged to low annual income category and only 08.00 per cent belonged to high annual income category. In general, it could be said that the respondents were having medium as to low annual income. This might be due to less land holding due to

fragmented land.

Table 9: Distribution of respondents according to mass media exposure (n=100)

Sr. No.	Categories of mass media exposure	Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Lower	17	17.00
2	Moderate	55	55.00
3	Higher	28	28.00
	Total	100	100.00

(Mean score = 7.48), (SD = 1.43)

From the table 9, it is evident that the slightly more than half of respondents (55.00 per cent) belonged to moderate mass media exposure, followed by higher (28.00 per cent) and lower (17.00 per cent). In general, it could be said that the majority of respondents (83.00 per cent) belonged to moderate and high mass media exposure. This might be due to rapid changing technology.

Table 11: Distribution of respondents according to social participation (n=100)

Sr. No.	Social participation	Respondents		
		Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1	No membership in any organization	00	00.00	IV
2	Membership in one organization	23	23.00	III
3	Membership in more than one organization	67	67.00	II
4	Holding position in organization	100	100.00	I

The data presented in table 11 revealed that 100.00 per cent of respondents were holding the position in respective social organization ranked first, as a women sarpanch were purposively selected for the study followed by 67.00 per cent of the respondents had membership in more than one organization ranked second and 23.00 per cent of them had membership in one organization ranked third. Similar findings on socio-demographic profile of panchayat leaders were reported by Batra (2016) ^[2], Kumari *et al.* (2016) ^[4], Patel *et al.* (2017) ^[7] and Parmar *et al.*, (2025) ^[6].

Table 12: Distribution of respondents according to management orientation (n=100)

Sr. No.	Categories of management orientation	Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Lower	18	18.00
2	Moderate	71	71.00
3	Higher	11	11.00
	Total	100	100.00

(Mean score = 19.98), (SD = 4.24)

It was revealed from table 14 and fig. 14 that majority 71.00 per cent of the respondents possessed moderate management orientation followed by 18.00 and 11.00 per cent had lower and higher management orientation respectively. In general, the majority of respondents (71.00 per cent) had moderate management orientation. The probable reason for the above finding might be that the respondents had good perception about the importance of managerial aspect in their panchayat after their active participation in different activities of extension institutions.

Table 10: Distribution of respondents according to political contact (n=100)

Sr. No.	Categories of political contact	Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Lower	20	20.00
2	Moderate	62	62.00
3	Higher	18	18.00
	Total	100	100.00

(Mean score = 7.09), (SD = 1.88)

Data presented in table 10 revealed that majority 62.00 per cent of the respondents had moderate political contact, whereas, 20.00 per cent and 18.00 per cent of them had lower political contact and higher political contact, respectively. In general, it could be said that the majority of the respondents (62.00 per cent) had moderate political contact. The probable reason may be that all women sarpanch doesn't have contact with higher political leaders like Minister, MLA and MP.

Knowledge level of respondents about fundamental functions of constitutional bodies

Table 13: Distribution of respondents according to knowledge about fundamental functions of constitutional bodies (n=100)

Sr. No.	Categories of knowledge about Fundamental functions of constitutional bodies	Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Lower	27	27.00
2	Moderate	61	61.00
3	Higher	12	12.00
	Total	100	100.00

(Mean score = 55.88), (SD = 5.65)

It was revealed from table 13 that majority of respondents (61.00 per cent) had medium level of knowledge followed by 27.00 per cent and 12.00 per cent had lower and higher level of knowledge about fundamental functions of constitutional bodies, respectively. In general, majority of respondents (61.00 per cent) had moderate knowledge about fundamental functions of constitutional bodies. The probable reason for the above finding might be medium level of education level. The finding is in concurrence with findings reported by Batra (2016) ^[2] and Singh *et al.* (2016) ^[8].

Association between profile of women sarpanch with knowledge level about fundamental functions of constitutional bodies

The association between the personal profile of the respondents viz. age, education, caste, occupation, family

size, family type, land holding, annual income, mass media exposure, political contact, social participation and management orientation with knowledge about fundamental functions of constitutional bodies was worked out by using coefficient of correlation.

Table 14: Relationship between personal profile and knowledge of respondents about fundamental functions of constitutional bodies (n=100)

Sr. No.	Variables	Coefficient of correlation (r)
1	Age	0.3520**
2	Caste	0.0888
3	Education	0.6170**
4	Family type	0.2113*
5	Family size	0.3166**
6	Occupation	-0.0154
7	Land holding	0.0051
8	Annual income	0.2210*
9	Mass media exposure	0.5101**
10	Political contact	0.2148*
11	Social participation	0.3573**
12	Management orientation	0.3282**

* Significant at 0.05 level, ** Significant at 0.01 level

The data presented in table 18 and fig. 18 revealed that age (0.352**), education (0.617**), family size (0.316**), mass media exposure (0.510**), social participation (0.357**) and management orientation (0.328**) were found positively and highly significantly associated with knowledge about fundamental functions of constitutional bodies and family type (0.211*), annual income (0.221*) and political contact (0.214*) were found positively and significantly associated with knowledge about fundamental functions of constitutional bodies. Whereas, caste (0.088) and land holding (0.005) had positively non-significant association. While, occupation (-0.015) had negatively non-significant association with knowledge of respondents about fundamental functions of constitutional bodies. This finding was in conformity with the findings of Parmar *et al.*, (2025) [6].

Conclusion

The study concludes that women sarpanch in Navsari district possess a moderate level of knowledge regarding the fundamental functions of constitutional bodies. The majority of respondents were middle-aged, educated up to the secondary level, engaged in agriculture-based occupations and had moderate exposure to mass media, political networks and management-oriented activities. Significant positive relationships were observed between knowledge level and variables such as age, education, family size, family type, annual income, mass media exposure, political contact, social participation and management orientation. Among these, education and mass media exposure emerged as particularly influential factors. The findings suggest that enhancing educational opportunities, strengthening information dissemination mechanisms and promoting active social and political engagement can improve constitutional governance awareness among women sarpanch. Targeted training and capacity-building programmes are therefore essential to empower women leaders and enhance the effectiveness of local self-governance institutions in rural areas.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare there is no conflict of interest among them.

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