

Enhancing Women's Political Participation through Mahila Sabha

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Women's political representation in South Asia

- On an average, women hold only 7 percent of ministerial positions and 18 percent in national parliaments in all the 8 countries of the South Asia region, which falls below the global average of 25 per cent
- Less than half of South Asian countries have a Constitutional quota for women in their national parliaments.



India: As on December 2022, women make up **14.94%** of the **House of People** and about **14.05%** of the Council of States



Nepal: Women account for about **33%** of the seats in the **House of Representative**s and around **33%** in the **National Assembly**.



Pakistan: Women hold about **20% of the seats in the National Assembly** and around **22% in the Senate**



Afghanistan: Women hold around **27%** of the seats in the **Parliament**.



Bangladesh: Women hold around **20%** of the seats in the **National Parliament**



Sri Lanka & Maldives: Women hold around **5%** of the seats in the **Parliament**

Women's political representation in India

- Women were granted **equal voting rights** with men since India gained independence in 1947.
- However, **women's turnout in elections** has been lower than men's. In the 2019 general election, 67.1% of eligible women voted compared to 71.4% of eligible men.
- **Representation of women in parliament** increased from 5.3% in the first Lok Sabha (House of People) in 1952 to 14.94% in the current 17th Lok Sabha elected in 2019.
- **At the state level, 9.8% of state legislators** across India are women as of 2019.
- **Only 2 out of 26 Chief Ministers** of states and union territories are women as of 2022.
- **India ranked 148 out of 193** countries in terms of women's representation in the lower or house of parliament according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2022.

Participation of Women in Legislative Assemblies of State/UT

Sr. No.	Name of State / UT	Year of Last General Election to Legislative Assembly	% Of Women Contestants	% Of Seats won by Women
1.	Andhra Pradesh	2019	9.96	8.00
2.	Arunachal Pradesh	2019	5.98	5.00
3.	Assam	2021	8.03	4.76
4.	Bihar	2020	9.91	10.70
5.	Chhattisgarh	2018	10.40	14.44
6.	Goa	2022	8.64	7.50
7.	Gujarat	2017	6.89	7.14
8.	Haryana	2019	9.24	10.00
9.	Himachal Pradesh	2017	5.62	5.88
10.	Jammu and Kashmir	2014	3.37	2.30
11.	Jharkhand	2019	10.44	12.35
12.	Karnataka	2018	8.31	3.1

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13.	Kerala	2021	10.97	7.86
14.	Madhya Pradesh	2018	8.62	9.13
15.	Maharashtra	2019	7.38	8.33
16.	Manipur	2022	6.42	8.33
17.	Meghalaya	2018	8.86	5.08
18.	Mizoram	2018	8.61	0
19.	Nagaland	2018	2.56	0
20.	Odisha	2019	9.94	8.90
21.	Punjab	2022	7.13	11.11
22.	Rajasthan	2018	8.24	12.00
23.	Sikkim	2019	10.66	9.38
24.	Tamil Nadu	2021	10.33	5.13

Participation of Women in Legislative Assemblies of State/UT

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25.	Telangana	2018	7.69	5.04
26.	Tripura	2018	8.08	5.00
27.	Uttarakhand	2022	9.97	11.43
28.	Uttar Pradesh	2022	12.63	11.66
29.	West Bengal	2021	11.34	13.70
30.	NCT of Delhi	2020	11.76	11.43
31.	Puducherry	2021	11.11	3.33

Women's representation in local government

- ❑ In 1992, following the recommendations of the National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000, the **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts** (1992) mandated the reservation of 1/3rd of seats for women in PRIs and in urban local bodies.
- ❑ This has enhanced women's political participation and leadership at the three tier panchayat (village council) and municipality levels.
- ❑ As per latest data from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (Local Governance)in 2022:
 - Women occupy 44.7% of elected panchayat positions at village level.
 - Women occupy 50.6% of district panchayat member positions.
 - Women occupy 47.3% of panchayat chairperson positions at all levels.
- ❑ Currently, 20 states have expanded reservations for women in their Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to 50 percent.

Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, Uttarakhand and West Bengal



Women's leadership in PRI

- ❑ Women's leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India has been a significant development in promoting grassroots democracy and gender equality.
- ❑ Women leaders in PRIs have brought a different perspective to governance, often focusing on issues such as health, education, sanitation, nutrition and women's empowerment. They have been instrumental in advocating for policies and programs that address the needs and concerns of women and marginalized communities.
- ❑ Elected women representatives have contributed to improving development outcomes in rural India, but their contributions are largely undervalued and neglected
- ❑ Despite the progress, women leaders in PRIs continue to face various challenges, including gender bias, limited resources, lack of support from male counterparts, and social barriers.
- ❑ Additionally, there are concerns about the **quality of women's participation** and the **need for capacity-building initiatives** to enhance their leadership skills.

Barriers Facing Women in Politics

1. Patriarchal Mind-set:

- Women are often considered inferior to men. This **mind-set is deeply ingrained in society and affects the way people perceive women's abilities** to lead and participate in politics.

2. Social Norms and Stereotypes:

- often expected to **conform to traditional gender roles** and are discouraged from pursuing careers in politics.

3. Limited Access to Education:

- Women in India have **limited access to education**, which has hindered their ability to participate in politics.

4. Limited Representation in Political Parties:

- Women are **often underrepresented in political parties**, making it difficult for them to rise through the ranks and secure party nominations for elections.
- This lack of representation can be attributed to gender bias within political parties and the perception that women are not as electable as men.

Barriers Facing Women in Politics and Bureaucracy

5. Violence and Harassment:

- Women in **politics** are often subjected to **violence and harassment, both physical and online**, which can deter them from entering politics or speaking out on issues.

6. Unequal Opportunities:

- Women often **face unequal opportunities, such as lower salaries, less access to resources**, and limited networking opportunities. This inequality can make it challenging for women to compete with male candidates and succeed in politics.

Mahila Sabhas

Gram Sabha (Village Assembly)

What is Gram Sabha

- ❑ Gram Sabha serves as a cornerstone of grassroots democracy in India, empowering villagers to actively engage in the governance of their communities and fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility towards local development.
- ❑ The decisions taken by the Gram Sabha cannot be annulled by any other body. The power to annul a decision of the Gram Sabha rests with the Gram Sabha only.
- ❑ Less participation and involvement of Women in GS

Members of Gram Sabha

- ❑ Persons, those who are above 18 years of age and
- ❑ living in the village and
- ❑ whose names are included in the electoral rolls for the Panchayat at the village level.

Importance of Gram Sabha:

- ❑ Decision Making body
- ❑ Transparency and Accountability
- ❑ Social Justice/ inclusivity
- ❑ Planning & Resource Allocation

Initiatives by NIRD&PR

- ❑ The NIRDPR in Collaboration with UNICEF partnered with the 5 states SIRDPRs namely Telangana, Assam, Sikkim, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu to implement the project on Mahila Sabha & Bal Sabha titled “Mainstreaming the Roles of the Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas into GPDP Preparation”.
- ❑ NIRDPR and UNICEF in collaboration with SIRDPRs of Telangana, Sikkim and Assam states facilitated Mahila Sabhas and Bal Sabhas in 30 Gram Panchayats.
- ❑ The findings are discussed in next slides.

Organising

Mahila Sabhas

Why Mahila Sabha ?

- To make political systems/ democratic institutions - inclusive
- A Mahila Sabha is a meeting of women in India, typically at the village level under the Village Council, that serves as a platform for them to discuss issues, share experiences, and work together to improve their lives.
- Mahila Sabhas play a crucial role in empowering women by providing them with a platform for voice, leadership, and participation. It can continue to be powerful catalysts for positive change



Challenges for Women's Political Participation in Mahila Sabha

Social barriers

- **Patriarchal norms:** Deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes and societal pressures often discourage women, from actively participating in the Gram Sabha.
- **Lack of awareness:** Women may not be aware of the existence or purpose of the Gram Sabha, limiting their involvement.
- **Literacy and language barriers:** Low literacy rates and limitations with the dominant language used in Sabhas can exclude women from discussions and decision-making.
- **Violence** against women in politics, including harassment and intimidation

Structural barriers

- **Inadequate funding:** Limited financial resources can restrict the reach and effectiveness of Sabhas, hindering their ability to organize activities and engage a wider audience.
- **Lack of training and capacity building:** Members and facilitators may lack essential skills for effective communication, leadership, and project management, limiting the impact of their initiatives.
- **Political interference:** External pressures from local authorities or political parties can stifle independent voice and action within the Sabha.

Challenges for Women's Political Participation in Mahila Sabha

Internal challenges

- **Internal conflicts:** Differences in opinions, caste dynamics, or personal rivalries within the Gram Sabha can hinder collective action and create divisions.
- **Limited engagement:** Difficulty sustaining consistent participation and ensuring active involvement of all members can weaken the Gram Sabha's effectiveness.
- **Sustainability:** Ensuring long-term continuity and financial sustainability of the Sabha can be challenging without proper planning and support.

Emerging challenges

- **Urbanization and changing demographics:** As societies evolve, adapting the traditional format of Gram Sabhas to cater to new needs and challenges faced by women, particularly in urban settings, is crucial.
- **Technological integration:** Effectively leveraging technology for communication, knowledge sharing, and resource mobilization can be challenging due to lack of access and digital literacy.

Getting Women To Mahila Sabha

- ❑ **MoPR Advisory**

- ❑ **Getting the mandate** of the state/province – Negotiate & Advocate

- ❑ **Mobilization** for Mahila Sabha- Through Gram Panchayat

- ❑ Village Organisation of SHG

- ❑ Mothers Committees of Anganwadi's (a centre providing care for mothers and young children in a rural area.)

- ❑ Health Workers

- ❑ School Children

- ❑ **Entry Point Activities** – Talk on Menstrual Hygiene, Breast Cancer, Livelihood opportunities, Competitions, Celebrating Festivals – helped in gathering women & explaining them about the importance of Mahila Sabha

- ❑ Organising Mahila Sabha

**Issues
identified in
Mahila
Sabhas**

- ❖ **Gaps in implementation of schemes - Inclusion of eligible beneficiaries in Central and State Government Schemes**
- ❖ **Facilities for sanitation and drinking water**
- ❖ **Roads and street lighting in specific locations of the GP for safety of women and girls**
- ❖ **Cases of domestic violence, Child marriage and Alcohol and drug prevention**
- ❖ **Covid vaccine**
- ❖ **New Ration cards**
- ❖ **Construction of Toilets and Community hall**
- ❖ **Public toilets for women in market places**
- ❖ **Specials health camps and awareness camps for elderly and differently abled**

**Issues
identified in
Mahila Sabhas**

- ❖ **Issues such as mental health, alcoholism, mobile addiction etc.**
- ❖ **Challenges in value addition and marketing of rural products**
- ❖ **Depleting water sources**
- ❖ **Poor operation and maintenance of water supply system**
- ❖ **Lack of awareness on solid and liquid waste management especially plastics**

What is GPDP

❑ A Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) is a **strategic document** that **outlines the development priorities and goals for a specific Gram Panchayat**

❑ It aims to **identify the needs and aspirations of the community** and to chart out a **roadmap for the overall development** of the village

❑ The plan covers various aspects of development such as infrastructure, agriculture, healthcare, education, sanitation, water supply, employment generation, environmental conservation.

Key components of GPDP:

1. **Socio-economic profile of the village:** This includes demographic data, economic indicators, literacy rates, health indicators, etc.
2. **Identification of priorities:** Based on consultations with the community, key priorities and development needs are identified.
3. **Sector-wise development plans:** Plans are made for various sectors like agriculture, infrastructure, education, health, etc., detailing specific projects and initiatives.
4. **Resource mobilization:** The plan also outlines the sources of funding for various projects, including government grants, local taxes, and contributions from NGOs or private sector **organizations**.
5. **Implementation framework:** It includes timelines, responsibilities, monitoring mechanisms, and evaluation criteria for the successful execution of the plan.

Challenges in Organizing Mahila Sabha

- ❖ **Villagers are unaware of the significance of MS**
- ❖ **In MS women are unable to openly express their concerns about safety**
- ❖ **Women who are vulnerable or poor do not attend MS-
Loss of livelihoods**
- ❖ **Even if the issues are discussed in the MS, women do not believe they can be resolved.**
- ❖ **Having difficulties visiting GPs from far away villages -
Location**

Challenges in Organizing Mahila Sabha & Bal Sabha

- ❖ **Insufficient funds in GPs to resolve the MS resolutions**
- ❖ **The GP level budget for organizing (Logistics) the Sabhas is inadequate.**
- ❖ **Hard to reach GPs like NARTAP GP in Assam where people were reluctant to come very far to attend SABHAS.**

Organizing Mahila Sabha



Organizing Mahila Sabha



Mahila Sabhas Outputs

- ❖ **Women are aware of their eligibility for various State and Central Government schemes**
- ❖ **Capable of questioning relevant departments about non-coverage of eligible beneficiaries**
- ❖ **Women are aware of their rights**
- ❖ **Increased participation and involvement of women in planning**
- ❖ **GPs began to prioritise women's issues**
- ❖ **Certain issues are discussed and are resolved on the spot**

Learnings

- ❖ **Women are empowered, and their priorities are identified which are to be incorporated into GPDP.**
- ❖ **Improved convergence approach between line departments at the GP level**
- ❖ **Women and children have become more aware of protection laws**
- ❖ **ERs are more aware of women and child development issues**
- ❖ **Improved GP functionaries' capacity to enhance systems and processes to improve enrolment, coverage, and access to all government schemes, particularly for the women**

Bal

Sabhas

Organising

Bal Sabha

"Bal Sabha" translates to "Children's Council" and refers to various initiatives in India aimed at empowering children and fostering their holistic development.

1. Education:

- By providing learning opportunities outside classrooms, Bal Sabhas can complement formal education and cater to diverse learning styles.
- They create engaging environments for children to develop critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills.
- Through peer-to-peer learning and interactive activities, Bal Sabhas can address learning gaps and enhance leadership qualities.

2. Socialization and Citizenship:

- Bal Sabhas provide safe spaces for children to interact with peers, fostering social skills and building friendships.
- They promote responsible citizenship by encouraging discussion and action on community issues, fostering civic engagement.
- By participating in decision-making processes, children learn about democratic values and develop responsible behaviour.

Bal Sabha

3. Gender Equality and Empowerment:

- By encouraging girls' participation in Bal Sabhas, they can challenge gender stereotypes and promote equal opportunities for leadership and decision-making.
- Bal Sabhas can also focus on raising awareness about gender equality and combating harmful gender norms.
- This can empower girls to advocate for themselves and contribute to building a more inclusive society.

4. Mental Health and Well-being:

- Bal Sabhas offer opportunities for creative expression, play, and social interaction, contributing to children's emotional well-being.
- By providing peer support and a sense of belonging, they can help reduce stress and anxiety, especially in vulnerable situations.
- Bal Sabhas can also function as platforms for raising awareness about mental health issues and promoting positive coping mechanisms.

5. Cultural Preservation and Identity:

- offer platforms for showcasing and transmitting traditional customs, arts, and languages to younger generations.
- Helps in connecting with their cultural heritage and develop a sense of belonging and identity.

Challenges of Children's Assembly

- ❑ **Awareness and Education:** Many children, especially those from marginalized communities, are not aware of their rights or the concept of Bal Sabha. Lack of education and awareness can hinder their participation.
- ❑ **Child Labour and Exploitation:** In areas with high rates of child labour, children may not have the time or opportunity to participate in Bal Sabhas. Moreover, those who are engaged in child labour may face exploitation and abuse, making it difficult for them to speak up or participate freely.
- ❑ **Socio-economic Factors:** Poverty, lack of access to resources, and unequal distribution of opportunities can hinder children's participation in Bal Sabhas. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds may prioritize earning money or supporting their families over participating in such activities.
- ❑ **Gender Discrimination:** Gender biases can limit girls' participation in Bal Sabhas, especially in patriarchal societies where girls are often expected to prioritize household chores and caregiving responsibilities over extracurricular activities.
- ❑ **Infrastructure and Resources:** Many schools and communities lack the necessary infrastructure and resources to facilitate Bal Sabhas. This includes lack of suitable meeting spaces, educational materials, and trained facilitators.

Challenges of Children's Assembly

- ❑ **Bureaucratic and Administrative Challenges:** Sometimes, bureaucratic hurdles and administrative red tape can impede the establishment and functioning of Bal Sabhas. Obtaining necessary permissions and support from authorities may be a challenge.
- ❑ **Child Protection and Safety:** Ensuring the safety and protection of children participating in Bal Sabhas is paramount. This includes safeguarding them from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as providing a supportive environment where they feel comfortable expressing their views.
- ❑ **Language and Cultural Barriers:** In a country as diverse as India, linguistic and cultural differences can pose challenges to effective communication and participation in Bal Sabhas, particularly in regions with multiple dialects and languages.
- ❑ **Sustainability:** Maintaining long-term engagement and interest among children in Bal Sabhas can be challenging. Without continuous support and reinforcement, participation may dwindle over time.
- ❑ **Political Will and Support:** The success of Bal Sabhas also depends on the commitment and support of policymakers, government agencies, and other stakeholders. Without adequate support, initiatives may struggle to gain traction or sustain momentum.

Getting Children To Bal Sabha

- ❑ Through Gram Panchayat
- ❑ Village Organisation of SHG
- ❑ Mothers Committees of Anganwadi's (a centre providing care for mothers and young children in a rural area.)
- ❑ School Children

- ❑ Entry Point Activities – Talks, Drama, Dance competitions, Celebrating Festivals – helped in gathering girls & boys and explaining them about the importance of Bal Sabha
- ❑ Organising Bal Sabha

Reluctance of States for organizing Bal Sabha

Issues identified in Bal Sabhas

- ❖ Infrastructure in schools
- ❖ Separate toilets for girl children
- ❖ Drinking water and quality of Mid Day meal
- ❖ Playground and play material
- ❖ Library and Auditorium, facilities in Boarding Hostels
- ❖ Bus shelters at school bus stops
- ❖ Discussion on Child labor and child marriage instances in the GP
- ❖ Sanitation needs of Girl Children

**Issues
identified
in Bal Sabhas**

- ❖ **Dropouts**
- ❖ **Students & Teachers attendance**
- ❖ **Transport facility**
- ❖ **Child Protection issues -Child abuse, Discrimination, Eve Teasing**
- ❖ **Fencing of school,**
- ❖ **Lack of awareness on child issues and rights**
- ❖ **Issue of drug addiction and suicide.**
- ❖ **Lack of career counselling**
- ❖ **Lack of forum to support various talents of children**
- ❖ **No/Lack of Creche facilities in MGNREGA sites**
- ❖ **Lack of disposal system of sanitary napkins**

**Challenges
In Organising
Bal Sabhas**

- ❖ **The majority of children aged 15 to 18 do not attend BS**
- ❖ **Having difficulties visiting GPs from villages**
- ❖ **Insufficient funds in GPs to resolve the BS resolutions**
- ❖ **Reluctance of Parents to send children to Bala Sabha meetings initially as there was limited awareness among parents/teachers on the importance of such a forum.**

Organising Bal Sabhas



Organising Bal Sabhas



Impact of Bal Sabhas

- ❖ **Children exposed to local governance**
- ❖ **Increased awareness among children about their GP, SDGs, government programmes, various issues faced by children at the GP level**
- ❖ **Increase in confidence and leadership skills among children**
- ❖ **Children's voices became a part of GPDP**
- ❖ **Children started visiting Gram Panchayat Office**

Impact of Bal Sabhas

- ❖ **PRIs oriented on Child Rights - Right to Survival, Development, Protection and Development.**
- ❖ **Identifying the children's needs in the GP, GP is aware of their priorities**
- ❖ **Sensitization of Line departments on children's needs.**
- ❖ **Bal Panchayats and committees are formed**
- ❖ **Children are less afraid to express their needs**
- ❖ **Participation of children in GP planning**



Thanks!