

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract:

Panchayati Raj Institution is the Indian Avatar of grass root democracy which was implemented envisioning not only rural development, but also social justice and empowerment which are integral constituents of development. However, it exists in a context – the context of traditional as well as changing rural India marked by socio-economic-cultural diversity. In tandem with the context, PRI are also dynamic and are impacted by the social hierarchies and inequalities that exist in the society deterring the marginalized to come and participate in PRI. The study seeks to understand the context and dynamics of community participation in the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions and to suggest suitable interventions for enhancing community participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The study notes that participation requires a cultural context in which such participation is supported and mechanisms for its survival are ensured, but, such mechanisms are found missing and current institutional formats/structures/procedures seem to be hijacked by existing social order. The study found sub-group specific participation practices which seem to be revolving under four major areas which are Awareness Concerns, Indifference, Restrictions and Constraints in participation and Rural Elite Capture.

Key Words: Panchayati Raj, Community Participation, Grass Root Democracy, Social Dynamics

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Panchayati Raj Institution in India is the world's largest grass-root governance mechanism and it bears the legal and moral responsibility of not only rural development, but also social justice and empowerment which are integral constituents of development. Panchayati Raj is claimed by pioneer rural sociologist A R Desai as a real democratic political apparatus which would bring the masses into active political control from below, to the vast majority of the weaker, poor sections of rural India (1994, 533). It was conceived that such democratic renewal through reorganizing the power structure would bring the government closer to people. It was seen as a means to deepen democracy, make governance accountable and responsive. Not only would it enhance the effectiveness of public policies and service delivery, but also give greater voice to citizens.

It is also almost unanimously agreed that it has the potential to eradicate the socio economic malaise and the only pre condition for that is the participation of all stakeholders, most importantly of those who are the constituents of this democratic setup i.e. the citizenry. Scholars have viewed such participation as means as well as end for development. According to Fernandes (2003), this would require transformation of Panchayati Raj from being mechanical devolution of power to being community institutions, with a certain legitimacy attained with the support and participation from a large section of the population. He further argues that devolution of powers be accompanied by 'social contract' with all-inclusive participatory planning and associationalism, since there is a danger of it leading to the replacement of a state bureaucracy with a Panchayat bureaucracy with all its functional malaise.

PRI being the Indian Avtar of the grass root democracy, it exists in a context – the context of traditional as well as changing rural India. Like any other political processes, PRI is also a marked by socio-economic-cultural diversity

since India is a diverse country in terms of its population marked by differences in caste, class, gender, language and religion among others. On one hand, the continuing caste, class, gender, religious and other differences marks the characteristics of traditional rural India, on the other hand the improving educational levels, change in gender roles and better communication facilities for masses mark the changing rural India. In such a dynamic context, PRI are also dynamic and are constantly trying to identify solutions for ever increasing problems of rural populace and while doing so, the attempts of policy makers are channeled in one direction i.e. ensuring people's participation in the institutions of Gram Swaraj.

Such socio-economic and political diversity dominates the relationship of one person with other and at the same time the belongingness of an individual in these categories determines his/her capacity to participate in political discourse, be it national, provincial or local. The particular location of individual in such a social system affects her/his ability to impact the group or social action, politics being a prominent one, and in turn affects the same individual from the outcomes of the social action.

For example, despite the aim of the participatory approach to give voice to excluded sections whose voices are ignored or not heard (Narayanan 2003), the social hierarchies and inequalities that exist in the society deter the marginalized to come and participate in the governance mechanisms like PRI. It is also observed that social exclusion in the rural community is often on such a large scale that community participation is actually the participation of a minuscule few. Moreover, Reddy (2003) says that it is a historical fact that traditionally PRI have been dominated by the powerful castes/classes. Aggravating this, is the tendency of dominant groups in the villages to unleash violence on the marginalized groups seeking to use the governance mechanism to serve their personal wants (de Souza, 2003). It becomes tough to counter such violence when the institutions responsible for law and order and ensuring justice like police force, is controlled by the same dominant groups that are insensitive and inattentive towards the plight of the suppressed.

In addition to these, poverty, unequal land distribution, illiteracy of the poor and less contested local elections have been identified as various factors that impede community participation in PRI (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2004).

However, various factors of socio-political change, especially growth of education and opportunities for mobility has changed the social structure to a great extent which though got momentum in post-independence era was accelerated after liberalization. This has affected the social and political structure at the village level and the meaning of Panchayati Raj is not the same in 2010s which traditionally used to be in India across its length and breadth. The ever increasing role of Civil Society Organizations in developmental scenario has also encouraged the people's participation in developmental process both governmental as well as non-governmental and PRI provided ample opportunities for the manifestation of such participation.

The passage of more than two decades since the enactment of 93rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 has given PRIs sufficient time to grow into the mature institution of grass-root democracy. Despite of it, community participation in PRI has become more pressing than ever with International Funders making it a precondition that all developmental schemes shall have inbuilt mechanism for citizens' participation. However, the current PRI in India is challenged by various socio-economic and political structures and it becomes imperative to delineate such structures and resulting patterns of participations in varying contexts.

The significance of participation become more critical in areas where unemployment is prevailing and natural resources are poor. Judicious use of such resources with sense of equity becomes the issue which can only be achieved by effective participation in PRI.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Panchayati Raj Institution came into existence in India in conformity with the Constitution (Seventy-third) Amendment Act with each state prescribing its own implementation mechanism and administrative structure. The main functions of PRIs were envisaged as enhancing development with two broad goals of improving the economic infrastructure of the locality and providing previously excluded groups and castes with opportunities for political power (Prasad, 1980).

Being a mechanism for governance with additional mandate for empowering unprivileged and oppressed, the attributes of good governance like participation, transparency and accountability are non-negotiable for PRIs (UNDP, 1997). Munshi (2004) defines good governance as “a participative manner of governing that functions in a responsible, accountable and transparent manner based on the principles of efficiency, legitimacy and consensus for the purpose of promoting the rights of individual citizens and the public interest, thus indicating the exercise of political will for ensuring the material welfare of society and sustainable development with social justice”.

Such a manner of governance calls for democratic decentralization which requires shifting as much power as is compatible with the national interest to provincial levels of government and from the provinces to the municipalities is well acknowledged as instrument for establishing self-governance (Chapman, 1973; Cheema and Rondinelli 2007).

Discussing democratic decentralization, Barnett et al., (1997), point out

“Democratic decentralization is the development of reciprocal relationships between central and local governments and between local governments and citizens. It addresses the power to develop and implement policy, the extension of democratic processes to lower levels of government, and measures to ensure that democracy is sustainable. Democratic decentralization incorporates both decentralization and democratic local governance.” (p. 2)

Johnson (2003) mentions that decentralization on its own will not bring the conditions that are more effective or more accountable to local needs and interests. He identifies four broad conditions under which local political bodies can be made more accountable to poor and politically marginal groups in society. These are:

- Active participation among broad elements of society, including voting, campaigning, attending meetings, running for office, lobbying representatives, etc.;
- Fiscal and political support from higher level authorities within government;
- The existence of competitive political parties whose legitimacy depends at least in part on the support of the poor;
- Deeper economic transformations which embolden traditionally subordinate groups to challenge local authority structures. (p.3)

The active political participation according to him is the first and foremost condition to bring the local issues to the fore. Moreover, it is universally acknowledged that inclusion and participation are the basic tenets of Good Governance for democratic politics and institutions and this brings forth the significance of community participation in governance mechanisms.

Community participation as a concept refers actions and reactions of people in response to the activities which affect the groups or sub groups and the individual positioning determines the magnitude of that action and reaction and is impacted by power relations. Power relation affects the capacity of individuals to participate and thus decides the extent of community participation.

The review of literature explores the key concepts of participation, local democracy and decentralization and their interrelationships drawing insights from the available literature. The review also aims at investigating the issues

related to Community Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions, as well as their functioning. It further tries to explore the major domains of Caste, Class and Gender and other social affiliations affecting the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

3.0 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of any study is the bedrock upon which methodological initiatives are based and analytical schemes are developed. In the context of the current study, the theoretical framework is a variegated assemblage of socio-political philosophies located in different realms of social life: economy, gender, caste and culture and hierarchy, but bound together by the sociology of participation. More specifically, the theoretical basis of the study on Community Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in various circumstances can be primarily built upon the postulates of Political Sociology, Political Economy and Welfare Economics. In the case of present study, the theoretical realms of Political Sociology provides the epistemological insights and guides the researcher to look into various aspects of issues under consideration for a variety of reasons.

Political Sociology is a combination of political science, sociology and psychology, which seek to explain how political outcomes affect and are effected by social circumstances. It is about people and how they relate to politics and in this case politics at grass roots. The broad contours of such framework include:

- What people think about politics, what policies they want, what makes them participate and at what level, what divides or unites them etc.
- Things that affect political preferences, attitudes, values and behaviour in society at large. (Rutgers n.d.)

Political culture and social capital, political action and participation including citizen participation in socio-political processes affected by social factors like Religion, Gender, and Class are at the core of discourses in Political Sociology.

Besides, within the domain of political sociology, participation is not a dichotomous entity, rather a continuum based on the degree of people's involvement in deciding or influencing the decision making process concerning the development program or its implementation. It is along this continuum that the models or typologies of participation are constructed by the various authors.

Although the types of participation differ from author to author, the main aspects which differentiate between the various stages within the typologies are the same. They share common ideas regarding the extent or the degree to which community members have the chance or are given the chance to decide for themselves.

4.0 STUDY LOCALE

The entirety of community participation in 64 Gram Panchayats in Sadauli Qadeem Community Development Block in Saharanpur District of Uttar Pradesh made the Universe for the study and multilevel sampling method was used to identify sample population. At the very first level, Purposive sampling under non-probability sampling method was used to select Gram Panchayats for studying community participation. Two Gram Panchayats (GP) in the Ghad region of Sadauli Qadeem Community Development Block of Saharanpur were selected accordingly. Both the Panchayats selected are located in acute water scarcer region of the District.

5.0 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

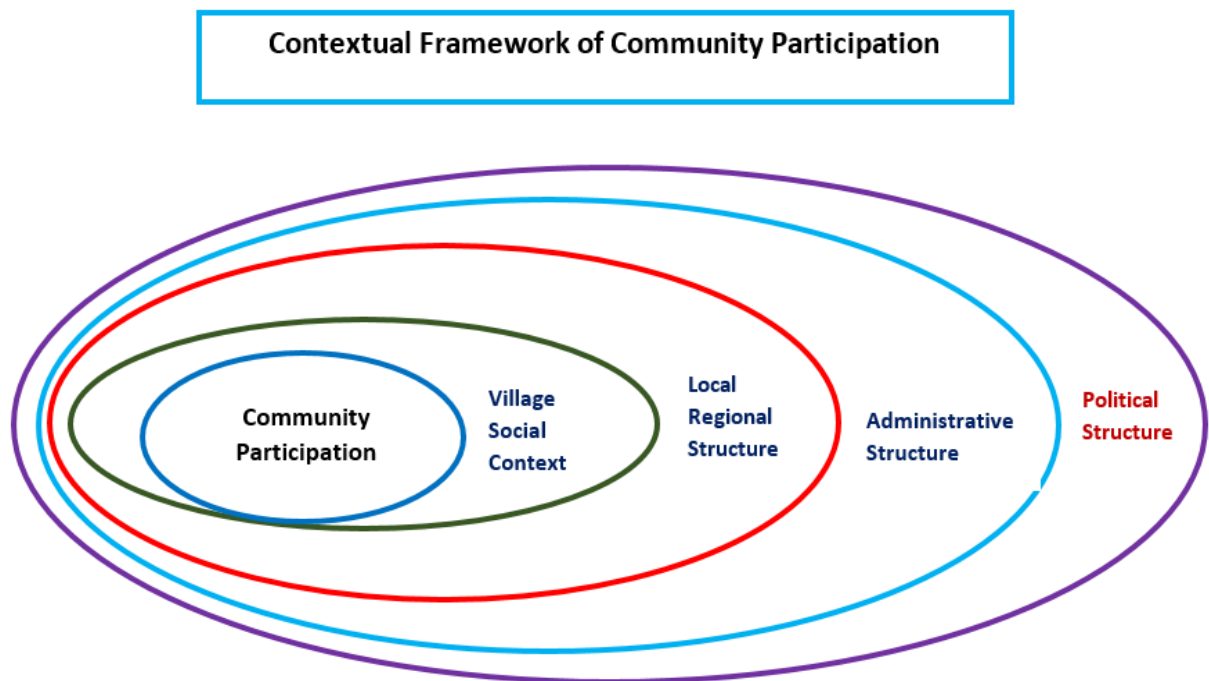
The data collection for the current study was carried out during four visits to the selected Universe of the study – Sadauli Qadeem Community Development Block. It started with a preparatory visit to identify the villages purposively. The second visit was focused majorly on data collection as well as its analysis. The third and fourth visit in the years were mainly dedicated to the study of changing context and Implications for social work theory, practice and research and complete the gaps identified post analysis.

Data collection and analysis were under taken in an iterative manner. The collection of data and analysis followed what Seidel (1998) spoke of – thinking, noticing and collecting things. Field notes aided in the analysis and further refining of the process of knowing the ‘field’.

6.0 DISCUSSION

6.1 CONTEXT OF PARTICIPATION

The study is based on the fundamental assumption that community participation is the product of the context in which occurs and its key objective is to understand the context and dynamics of community participation in the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Hence, the scope of context under study has been delineated in Macro, Meso and Micro levels. The political and administrative structures including the political discourses from national level to local levels as well as administrative structures put in place by various regulatory frameworks sets macro-context in which community participation occurs in PRI. Local and regional factors including geography and physical resources of the area under study constitutes the Meso-context for community participation. In addition, the micro-context is the manifestation of socio-economic- political factors and other aspects of lives of villagers. The current study analyzed villages selected to identify the interplay of the contexts which influences community participation in the PRI.



Macro Context: The Macro context of both the villages under study remain the same since they are part of same constituency with respect to national and state level politics and they are regulated by same legislations pertaining to grass root democracy. The impact of Macro-context in participation practices remain indirect in nature, since PRI in Uttar Pradesh has no political party system whereas national and level politics are driven by it. However, ideology based alliances found to impact PRI elections. Moreover, only a handful of villagers are in any way associated with political discourses of any kind and they try to influence the grass-root politics of the village.

Meso Context: The Meso context involving local and regional context of the villages also remain the same due to their proximity and location in the Community Development Block 'Sadauli Qadeem'. However, the regional context is extremely influential when it comes to participation practices of the people in view of its physical location within Ghad region. Community Development Block 'Sadauli Qadeem' is surrounded by Uttarakhand and Haryana and other Community Development Blocks of Saharanpur District of Uttar Pradesh and most part of it lies in the Ghad area (foothills of Himalaya) which faces acute water scarcity. Indira (1992) examining the living conditions at Ghad, writes that life in Ghad is rather harsh. Agriculture is difficult; not only is the soil un-cultivable; crop-depredation by elephants and wild pigs is a constant threat. Due to resource scarcity, the region faces migration to nearby states Punjab and Haryana; in brick-kilns; or as rickshaw-pullers in the neighboring towns. The Ghad lacks proper roads, electricity, health, educational and other facilities.

Further, Sadauli Qadeem block of Saharanpur is considered backward in terms of availability of schooling facilities, literacy rates (male, female and both), length of pucca road per 1000 sq. KM, number of electrified villages, medical facilities, drinking water facility and communication network. The Community Development Block lags much behind other blocks within District Saharanpur as well as Uttar Pradesh in terms of above-mentioned facilities. Pal (2003) Moreover, the majority of the population consists of low-caste Muslims and Dalits who are socio-economically backward.

Such a context of Ghad and consequential backwardness of Sadauli Qadeem Block is not conducive for effective participation practices. The resource scarcity and its effect of livelihood patterns of the population profoundly impacts participation practices. This manifests in the non-accessibility of many to participation processes due to physical non-availability in the locality.

Micro Context: The micro context covers the village specific characteristics of the context of participation and it differs in villages identified for study. The socio-economic-political diversity in these villages is significant and hence holds prominent role in influencing participation practices in these villages. A comparative analysis of the villages and their micro context is given below:

6.1.1 Fateullahpur

The village which is also known as Jattowala has two hamlets- Fateullahpur and Fateullahpur Mustakim (Must.). Both the hamlets forms Fateullahpur Gram Panchayat. According to 2001 Census, 1484 persons in the village belonged to Scheduled Caste which is 80% of the total population. Fateullahpur is located approx. 5 kilometers away from the Behat Tehsil town on the main road connecting Behat to Vikasnagar (Dehradun).

Religious affiliations do not play much role in the local political discourse and the reason is mainly attributed to very low population of Muslims in the village. Also, there is no representation of Muslims in the Gram Panchayat.

6.1.2 Sherpul Pelon

Sherpur Pelon is located approx. 15 Kms away from Behat Tehsil and 3 Km away from the main road connecting Behat and Vikasnagar (Dehradun). The village is a part of Sherpur Pelon Panchayat with Roshanpur Pelon and Chand Chak as two small hamlets under the same panchayat.

According to 2001 Census the village has an area of 96 KM Sq. with 581 households and a population of 2905. Around 25% of the population belongs to Scheduled Castes. The majority of the villagers are Muslim (65%) and a few families belong to various Hindu Castes like Rajput and Brahmins (5%), Gujjar, and Kashyap (5%).

6.2 PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN PRI

Issues of democratic socialization are starkly missing from both the villages and both the Panchayat is marked by passive participation of representatives and public on functioning of Gram Panchayat as well as Gram Sabha. Participation requires a cultural context in which such participation is supported and mechanisms for its survival are ensured. However, such mechanisms are found missing and whatever institutional formats/structures/procedures seem to be hijacked by existing social order. Still, the nature of participation at grass root follows power structures that have been existing in the village. Three axes of rural power in India as per Dsouza (2003) which include caste system, patriarchy and land ownership in Indian villages defines power structures and relationships between individuals in the villages. This power structure in turn governs the community participation. This has led to the phenomenon of elite capture of power is predominant in these villages.

Most significantly, community participation is found as neither monolithic nor divided in the usual socio-political-economic lines. Sub-group specific patterns with respect to community participation with clear segmentation which cut across socio-political-economic divisions like gender, caste, religion and class. These sub-groups have contrasting participation practices with conflicting reasons for adopting any particular participation practice.

The characteristics of such sub-group specific participation practices seem to be revolving under four major areas which are:

- a) Awareness Concerns
- b) Indifference
- c) Restrictions and Constraints in participation
- d) Rural Elite Capture.

Sub-group approach together with these characteristics which are interlinked to a great extent can provide a glimpse of the diverse participation practices in these villages which are unique and marked by their context. A deep impact of change in technology and connectivity as well as influence of Self Help Groups and youth is also observable in the participation practices.

The increasing role of transport has connected common people in this village to the block and district level officials and thus enhanced their voices in matters concerning them through Panchayati Raj. The increasing emphasis on Communication Technology has enabled many villagers to learn about various roles and responsibilities of Panchayati Raj and its allied activities. The IT Sewa Kendra in the village not only helps the villagers in availing various individual facilities but also is a centre for creating more awareness on the schemes being channeled through PRI.

The current Gram Panchayat is dominated by youth in both the villages. The ward members as well as the Pradhan are between 25-45 Years of age. Among the Gram Sabha Members also the awareness on various issues related to villages with respect to Panchayati Raj was high among youth in comparison to elderly. This was observed in case of youth both male as well as female.

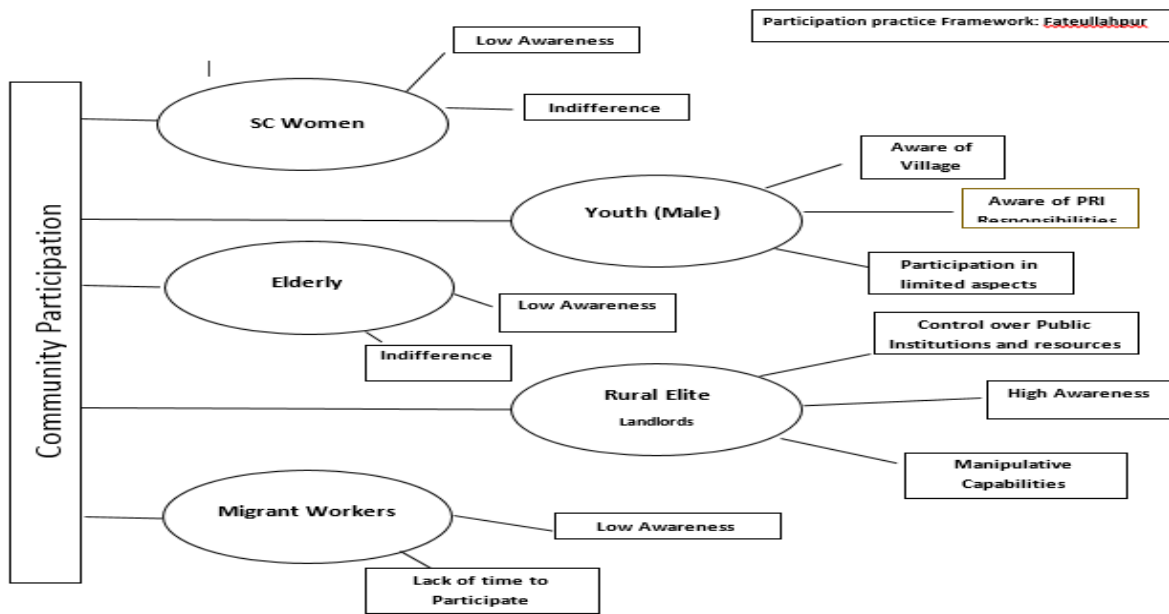
Self Help Groups (SHGs) established by Governmental as well as Non-Governmental Organizations are also participating in a big way in local politics. These groups have become the points for getting mass support. Their roles range from decision on candidate to raising the issues of day to day governance.

7.0 Participation practices

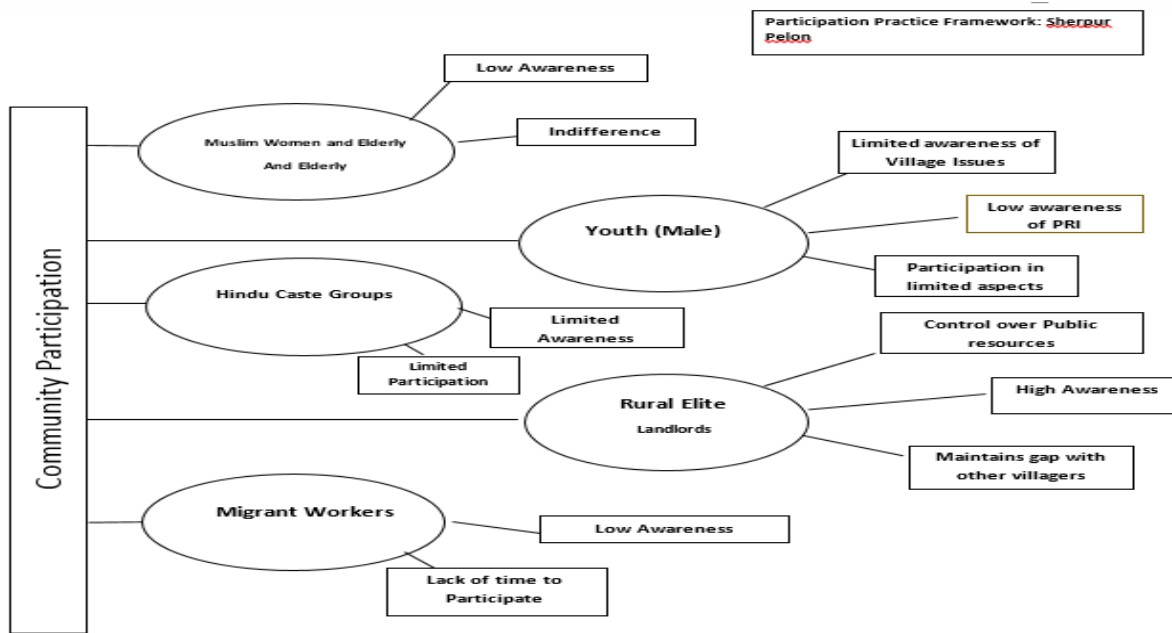
In both the villages, are sub group pattern emerged in the participation practices of various sub groups in community which were contrastingly different and even if similar in some cases, their reasons attributed for the same were highly diverse. The subgroups includes most of the population of the village who are affected most by the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Fateullahpur is a village where homogeneity as well as heterogeneity of caste dynamics can be observed easily in relation to Panchayati Raj. Since, more than 75% of the population belongs to SC category, according to some people, the voting for the post of Pradhan in gram Panchayat Elections has never been done on caste lines since mostly the seat was reserved and even when it was unreserved, a SC always won. A counter view could also be understood from some statements which provided that due to their numerical strength, SCs will only win the post of Pradhan, which is the influential position in PRI, in the village, irrespective of the talent and commitment of the candidates from other castes.

The following pattern of participation exists in Village Fateullahpur:



Most of the population belongs to Muslim community in Sherpur Pelon, dominant group control exists in election process, but Hindus Caste Groups are also involved in the process to the extent of contesting and winning elections for positions other than that of Pradhan. The diagram below provides an insight to the participation practices of community in Sherpur Pelon village.



The patterns emerging can be classified under four themes discussed earlier, which are Awareness Concerns, Indifference, Restrictions and Constraints in participation and Rural Elite Capture.

8.0 Awareness concerns

At both the villages, the various sub groups of community exists in different level of awareness. Awareness of the village level issues as well as the functions, resources and responsibilities of PRI was very low or incorrect among people across many sub groups with various reasons.

In Fatehullapur, while on one hand, the landlords which generally belong to SC male community have larger awareness of issues related to PRI, it's functioning and resources, the SC women across economic classes are rarely aware of the same. They are unaware of the PRI as an institution, its resources, responsibilities and functioning. Similar situation exist in case of village elders who are as also not aware of PRI and its responsibilities. While SC women put time as a major constraint for this, the physical and economical disabilities are major reasons for low awareness among elderly. Elderly women belonging to SC community remains at very low awareness levels. However, women who are part of SHGs are more aware of village problems and to some extent about the PRI regarding the members, and the major responsibilities of PRI which includes construction of village roads and water facility in the village. Rural local elite which primarily includes people who are land owners as well as male youth have high awareness due to better education and mobility.

Only a handful of the population, mostly small land owners or self-employed individuals in village was able to receive information on activities of Panchayati Raj in Fatehullapur. They were also able to attend the meetings of Gram Sabha and were aware to a great extent about the Gram Sabha Meetings and its generic role of discussing proposals. These were generally the people in the community who are politically active to a great extent with some

of them even having participated in elections or who were affiliated to some political parties. This group is generally dominated by men in the community and women were usually inactive in this regard.

In Sherpur Pelon, the groups with high awareness are landlords, very few women who are part of some SHGs and a few families who have greater mobility for reasons of their business in nearby town. Among a few families, the families in relation to panchayat members are also highly aware of some aspects of PRI. It was a fact that even the Panchayat Representatives were not aware of compulsory two meetings of Gram Sabha. Since female youth in the village live in very restrictive environment, they hardly know anything about PRI. While low level educational status of various sub groups like women, elderly and youth contributed to their low awareness levels, poor transport and communication facilities added to low awareness of male youth.

Though the meeting registers in both the villages contain the signature and name of many villagers including women and elderly, but the same people mention of not even hearing of the said meetings.

9.0 Indifference

In Fatehullapur, SC Women who are either part of SHG or not part of SHG along with non-SC women are completely indifferent towards their role in PRI. They recollect that they voted in elections of PRI, but very few are aware of which candidate they voted for. Running the entire business of PRI according to people from these sub groups were entirely the responsibility of the elected members of PRI. Many of the people in the village never tried to attend any Gram Sabha meeting,

Women both Muslim as well as Hindu share similar indifference towards participation in various activities related to PRI despite the fact that their awareness about village issues and PRI are different to certain extent in Sherpur Pelon. They could remember that they voted in elections of PRI, but very few are aware of for which candidate they voted. Their indifference is shared by most of the elder population who feel themselves unable to participate in village or Panchayati Raj activities. As they cannot contribute to the politics of the village which is now a day being governed by outside political factors, they feel alienated in the village socio – political discussion. Unlike the popular perception, village elders neither are active members of the village politics nor are considered so by the youth. Indifference towards people's participation has a different manifestation here. Rural elite or the people who by virtue of this fact control the panchayat activities do not consider people's participation as important requirement for success of PRI.

10.0 Restrictions/ Constraints in participation

Low education level and lack of time acts as limiting factor in participation practices of many sub groups. Many a time, participation is limited to merely voting as guided by husband or youth in family. Belonging to a lower Caste and or different religion does not play a restricting factor in the village to a great extent. The participation of SCs in representative aspects of PRI is quite high. But gender plays a very critical role in participation. Women awareness other than those who were directly involved in the socio economic developmental activities through SHGs or occupational positions like Anganwadi Workers or ANMs across caste and class subgroups showed low degree of participation.

Religious differences stand first when we talk about the constraints of participation in Sherpur Pelon. It impedes the participation of women from both the communities in the village. Though SHGs have proved to be a successful model of socio economical inclusion of disadvantaged groups particularly women in tough circumstances, low penetration of such developmental agencies also restricts the participation of disadvantaged groups. Since the villagers usually migrate to nearby towns or cities in pursuit of work, their participation is constrained by their unavailability in the location to contribute to PRI.

Official position of the individual to a great extent directed the participation of the individual in the both the villages. Community Members when contacted as their positions like Anganwadi Workers or ANM had very positive views of the PRI functioning in the village but when contacted at their place of living in midst of their family members they responded critically of entire functioning.

11.0 Rural Elite Capture

Though Fateullahpur provides a unique story of democratic decentralization, as people voted against a landlord and traditional leader to vote for a petty farmer of same caste, the elite rule over PRI which is practiced directly or indirectly is quite evident.

The advisory role of community is available to a chosen few who are generally the ardent supporters of the winners of Panchayati Raj elections or the leaders of their caste groups. Though the elections in this village are not fought on party lines, the ideology based groups can be easily traced in the community. The Panchayat Members, especially Pradhan looks for guidance from these ideologues but not from the larger community at all.

In Sherpur Pelon, village minority includes the OBC Hindus and SCs and they are almost nonexistent in the village politics and consequentially in functioning of Gram Panchayat. People from the sub groups especially women, SCs and Hindu OBCs were completely ignorant of the role of Gram Sabha in discussing and approving various village level issues including the creation of the village level plan. The role of voluntary organizations for SHGs was not a prominent one in this village and thus unlike Fateullahpur, women in Sherpur Pelon do not have a forum to discuss the village issues even informally.

Pradhan is usually in the habit of consulting some villagers who are not the office bearers of the Panchayat. But these people belong to the group that aided his political career or are his relatives and hence a large mass that is not related to Pradhan in this manner stays out of the 'businesses' of Gram panchayat. Also, due to the inability of Pradhan to perform various routine tasks because of his personal engagements, as firstly he is located outside the village in nearby town and secondly he has a business to look after, some activities are delegated to other citizens(read aides), but not to the community.

Consultation with community before every action in grass root is of immense importance in PRI, but this consultation is always seen as a barrier in way of functioning of PRI by those who are elected in both the villages. It has been reported by community youth that representatives and particularly the office bearers try to conceal the information from public about the grants they receive from government for developmental work in the community. The elected people usually do not want to convene Gram Sabha or other mechanisms of community consultations. The Gram Sabha control and give directions to Gram Panchayat, but its other way round in practice. Gram Panchayat with help of Panchayat Secretary conducts the meeting of Gram Sabha at its whim and fancies.

Also, the basic rights of members of Gram Sabha to advise and plan for Panchayat related activities and schemes are not available to people in these villages largely. The concept of financial and social audit of Panchayat work by Gram Sabha does not exist in general understanding of the community. Since most of the women denied any knowledge about the Gram Sabha meetings, the provisions for quota wise mandatory presence of women, SCs and STs in the Gram Sabha to perform the above mentioned tasks is not adhered to.

The sole objective of PRI was to give a chance to every citizen to participate in affairs of their day to day life and hence the concept of planning by Gram Sabha with a bottom up approach. But due to various socio-economic factors like caste, economic status and gender, this objective seems unachieved in case of Sadauli Qadeem Block.

Those elected to power appears to form a new rural elite in community and mass participation remains a far cry. Thus undermining the very idea of community control. In the PRI system, the Gram Sabha was supposed to control and give directions to Gram Panchayat, but its other way round in practice. Gram Panchayat with help of Panchayat Secretary conducts the meeting of Gram Sabha at its whim and fancies. It can also be noted that participation of people in general (who are not affiliated to any pressure group) is not at all important from the viewpoints of elected representatives. Secondly, the elected representatives self-identify more with bureaucratic setup and less with citizenry.

12.0 Conclusion:

The significance of an institution as the Panchayati Raj today has a rather eclectic meaning for maybe some of the villages in this country. The notion and the image of a village, of a villager, of and therein a panchayat to 'govern' itself appears a difficult task altogether. What appears more difficult is the concept of participation of all in the politics that governs their daily affairs.

The grand public seating of all the Gram Sabha members with their elected representatives occurs a mere twice a year theoretically; one on the Gram Sabha held at Republic day and the other on the same done on Independence day and sometimes on Gandhi Jayanti. On these remarkably poignant days of the nation, lies two rare occasions of actually seeing the panchayat or the leading governing institution of a gaon, gathered around the people living in the gaon and talking to them as one unit. The engagement with one's own elected representatives isn't something that is seen as worthy and draws the attention of people. Significant pointer to the situation is the stark lack of awareness of the people on importance of these important events which though are local in nature can affect his/her life to a great extent. It is in the context of the village itself, it's own historicity, it's own inter-sectional ties of communication, the nature of relations of segmented groups of people have within each other that influences the participation of village community in self-governance and the Panchayati Raj Institution. In the villages, it was observed that either people are ignorant about the importance of their participation in PRI or those who are aware of it are indifferent towards it.

Very few people are there who take pride within themselves in ensuring their participation in village level affairs. Liberalism and the Bentham-ian notion of the famous line 'for the greatest good for the highest number of people' isn't all that concentrated in the cities anymore, possibly once it was the character of City States of Greece as well as Indian Republics. But, in current scenario of politicization of this common good it does not exist. The will to decide, to choose for yourself, to take action, to protest, to step outside the normated lives dictated by age old mores and most importantly to discover and recognize oneself as a participant to the life that's running and crashing in the background of your being, has a long way to go within these marked landscapes A.K.A Indian villages. So participating and engaging in anything that is remotely even linked to notions of being communitarian is marked with precluding questions of 'why should I follow with the more popular, 'what good would that do to me'. The truth that the people when together and united against or in favour of certain cause(s) can achieve their goals, such unity has a precondition and that is participation and for participation the precondition is information. More the people are informed, more they are likely to participate. And this information will flow only if the bureaucratic setup and elites in local governance stop treating masses as their enemy for their short term selfish goals.

Participating in Panchayat activities, participating in processes of self-government are wide arrays of socio-political processes that need to be heavily deconstructed to make a better sense of whatever we seek to understand from them. It is here that the location and the inherent context of the village come of heavily influence in responding to questions of immense value. Some villages often unify easily for political causes and some gets easily divided over economic ones. United politically yet divided culturally, is not possible not at least in this context.

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