

**WOMEN-PANCHAYAT-ELECTIVES AT THE INTERFACE OF STATE AND VILLAGE POLITICS:  
Gendered Constructions of the Political Space**

**Stefanie Strulik**

This paper considers gram panchayat councils as an interface of the local village community with the state. Gram panchayat councils are bodies of self-governance at the village level in India and constitute the lowest tier of the reformed and re-institutionalized Panchayati Raj System. After the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional Amendments in the early 1990s and their attempts to democratize the existing political and administrative structures by prescribing, amongst many other reforms and reservations, a 1/3<sup>rd</sup> women's-quota for all Panchayati Raj bodies and offices, a great number of women made inroads into the local, hitherto almost exclusively male political arena. Based on empirical fieldwork of almost two years, this paper will look into the changes brought upon the local political arena by the political participation of women. Thereby it will focus particularly on the subtle changes in gendered structuration of the political space. It will be argued that by women's political participation, i.e. women's prioritizations and agenda setting, women's working styles or ways of "doing politics", gendered knowledge-systems and gendered support-systems, as well as gendered modes of interaction - the political space gets transformed. However, the new meanings and the feminization of the political space are highly contested and have to be again and again negotiated and defended not only vis-à-vis state authorities and other members of the panchayat system, but also within the village community. The paper will give special emphasis to the role state officials' support or non-cooperation, governmental guidelines, available governmental schemes or regulations and governmental training programs play concerning the women-electives' appropriation and transformation of the political space and thus eventually with regard to changing gender relations.

## **I. Introduction**

Researching the modern (Indian) state had been avoided for very long by disciplines coming from a qualitative paradigm. For one, the state was seen as too difficult to conceptualize, second it was understood as not being "researchable" with ethnographic methods.<sup>1</sup> Only from the mid-1980s onwards, in particular after Evans, Rueschemeyer and Skocpol's (1985) influential book "Bringing the State Back In", the interest from the previously rather skeptical disciplines in "the state", or rather the interest in its local manifestations, increased. Mostly local bureaucrats and the ways how through them 'the state' gets mediated with regard to the every day lives of rural people came to the centre of attention (e.g. Manor 1993, Gupta 1995, Brass 1997, Fuller and Bénéi 2000). One common outcome of most of these recent studies has been that "the state" can not (any longer) be understood as "(...) a discrete, monolithic entity 'acting' impersonally above or outside society" but that "(...) the boundary between the state and society is in reality unclear, blurred, porous or mobile" (Fuller / Harriss

---

<sup>1</sup> As for noted by Radcliffe-Brown (1940). Whatever research was undertaken nonetheless, used to focus generally on "traditional states", i.e. pre-capitalist, pre-industrial, non-Western states or the evolution of the modern state, internal and external dynamics of state formation from an evolutionist perspective. (Jessop 2001). Processual Paradigms of Political Anthropology even were convinced that there could be no meaningful research of "the state" and argued that instead local political processes should be at the focus of research (Kurz 2001, Vincent 1990). Also concerning India, either the research concentrated on traditional state systems or the evolution of the state (e.g. what started with Bailey (1963) or rather on local political processes as for instance by Srinivas (1962) or Kothari (1970).

2000:10). The discerned “blurring” of state and society at the level of local bureaucrats and the latter’s re-interpretation of distant state policies “beyond recognition” (Kaviraj 1991:91) runs through many studies as an explanation for the apparent “failure of the state” to implement its policies successfully.

At the beginning of this paper I would like clarify my methodological approach by making a case for an actor-oriented approach and shifting the attention slightly away from the bureaucrats, focusing at the *gram panchayat as an interface* instead. I will consider the latter as situated in a *gendered political arena* where different political actors negotiate state interventions in an interactional process.

For the sake of intelligibility, I reduce in this paper “state intervention” exemplarily to the “33% women’s quota” as prescribed by the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment.<sup>2</sup>

One of my arguments will be that the expectation that a “33% women’s quota in local governance” could be implemented by state intervention in a 1:1 translation according to the state’s professed sublime democratic ideals is misleading in the first place. In a society where within the dominant discourse gender is constructed in such a way that women are seen as unfit, too ignorant and naïve to do politics, where family honour is associated with gender segregation and a gendered division of labour designates reproduction work as women’s foremost duty, probably one should be (temporarily) content if the ongoing negotiation process gets pushed into hitherto impossible directions and some redefinitions and transformations in gender relations eventually take place.

Therefore, I will subsequently argue, by introducing one case study from Uttar Pradesh, that even in the context of societal expectation like extreme gender segregation (e.g. purdah) - under which women’s political participation would be usually dismissed as impossible and non-existent - new female political spaces are created and gender relation are subtly altered.

In the last part I will discuss the political trajectory of a woman-pradhan<sup>3</sup> from Himachal Pradesh who, contrarily to the case study introduced before, would be probably unanimously perceived as active. Presenting some of her experiences, I will show how women draw from different gendered knowledge-systems and support networks, as well as additional state provisions (like trainings, manuals, honorariums, equipment of panchayat offices etc.) to negotiate their ‘way of doing politics’ and how thereby the political space gets transformed.<sup>4</sup>

Let me start, however, with a brief overview of the reforms brought by the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment as well as introduce some historical background and terminologies regarding the panchayat system.

---

<sup>2</sup> Of course more common and tangible intervention usually discussed and negotiated at the interface panchayat would be all sorts of development schemes.

<sup>3</sup> Pradhan = head of the gram panchayat, in some states also sarpanch. The preference of the term varies regionally. Since in the two states where I did my fieldwork pradhan is the preferred denomination I will, in the following, exclusively use pradhan. Gram panchayat = local village council / body of self-governance which is part of a three-tier Panchayati Raj System, which got, referring to a “traditional” system, reformed and re-institutionalized with the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Indian constitution in 1993. More below.

<sup>4</sup> This paper is based on two years of ethnographic field work in India, (mostly) in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh (in three phases between 2000 – 2003). The research was part of a still ongoing Ph.D. project on “Women’s Political Participation in Local Governance and Changing Gender Relations”.

Those bodies of local governance at the village level, the gram panchayats, which are at the centre of this paper, constitute the lowest of three tiers (village, development-block, district) of the reformed and re-institutionalized Panchayati Raj System.

Apart from following global trends in development discourses one reason for India's recent endeavors for decentralization is certainly the realization that governmental development funds for the most part seep away in bureaucratic avenues on their way down from the central government to the village level. It became obvious that the implementation of governmental programmes or rather the development of villages "from above" had to remain ineffective as long as centralist governmental programmes are only inadequately adjusted to the interests and needs of the local population (Lieten and Srivastava 1999, Mathew 2000, Beteille 2002).

The "Modern Panchayati Raj Institutions" and thus the 73<sup>rd</sup>/ 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments refer to a much older, 'traditional' system of local self-governance of which written records can be found already in the Rig-Veda (ca. 1300BC).<sup>5</sup>

As a form of cultural affirmation in the face of colonial occupation the Panchayat-System was "rediscovered" and glorified, above all by M. K. Gandhi, but also by many other nationalists. It was proclaimed that the Panchayat system could be seen as t h e Indian form of primordial democracy and that independent India should hence be ruled "from below". Going back to the colonial times villages were idealized as autarkic units of self-government or so-called "little republics". This view was endorsed and further romanticized by the majority of independence leaders (Parel 1999, Mishra and Shivappa 2002, Klimkeit 1981, Lieten and Srivastava 1999).<sup>6</sup>

Local self-governance through panchayat bodies was incorporated already in the first constitution but politics and administration continued to be dominated by the central state government, hardly any devolution of power or funds took place and the influence and scopes for action of the panchayati raj bodies remained overall marginal (Mathew 2000).

Whatever powers the gram panchayat held, stayed concentrated in the hands of local elites (e.g. (senior), male representatives of the locally dominant (landholding) castes) and were often used to maintain (exploitive) local power relations (Girtler 1972).

Apart from devolving funds and development responsibilities to the local level, the constitutional amendments of 1993 intended to prevent this abusive aspect by introducing certain reservations for marginalized groups according to their percentage of the population and the already mentioned 33% women-quota for all reserved (SC, ST, OBC) and open seats.<sup>7</sup> By means of the women's quota, not only democratic ideals were sought to translate, but also sublime objectives like women's "empowerment" and "equality" in all societal fields were envisioned.

---

<sup>5</sup> Kuhn 1998:241. For more on the History of panchayat see e.g Girtler 1972, Chauhan1977:279-303, Gosh and Pramanik1999, Kuhn 1998, Mathew 1994 and 2000:3-22, Rajiv Gandhi Foundation 1997, Sharma 1999:67-74, Singh 1999:04-115, Vijayakumar 1999:31-49.

<sup>6</sup> Regarding the "re-invention" and mythical exaggeration of harmonious, autarkic village community see Beteille 1965: 141-84, Srinivas 1987:20-59, Madan 2002, Dumont 1966:67-89. Ambedkar even saw any democratization attempt doomed to fail and warned to endow the panchayats with more self-governing powers because he saw the Indian village as "a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism" (ibid. 1948 in Constituent Assembly Proceedings, Vol. VII:39, cf. Lieten / Srivastava 1999:19)

<sup>7</sup> E.g. So called Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and so called 'Other Backward Castes' (OBC) according to their respective local percentage of the population.

The “new panchayats” meet bi-monthly discuss village affairs and evaluate ongoing development initiatives. Moreover, the elected members, together with the pradhan and village secretary plan, prioritize and subsequently apply for future development schemes. Apart from very varied responsibilities<sup>8</sup> gram panchayats are also active in the mediation of local fights. The pradhan organizes, manages and supervises the implementation of the sanctioned programmes (e.g. construction of roads). Whereas the pradhan is accountable to the panchayat, the panchayat in turn is answerable bi-annually to the village assembly (gram sabha).<sup>9</sup>

## **II. Panchayat as Interface**

Considering the gram panchayat as an interface, where different “(...) possibly conflicting, forms of knowledge intersect and interact” (Long and Arce 1992:214) is one particularly promising starting-point to investigate the “local state” in the rural Indian context. However, it is important to note that thereby state knowledge and logics, often apparently represented by local bureaucrats (but also e.g. texts and manuals), constitute just one out of many different forms of knowledge from which different social actors draw in an interactive process.<sup>10</sup>

For the research of the local state, the gram panchayat offers a complex interface where state’s structural effects, i.e. formalized logics, prescriptions, rules, ideals and programmes are negotiated, rejected, appropriated, reproduced and transformed in a process of continuous interaction of different social actors like e.g. District, Block and village bureaucrats, party politicians, panchayat electives, villagers, different village groups and committees (e.g. women’s groups, water-committees etc.) – a process whereby the “state” gets appropriated, localized, re-interpreted and becomes an everyday experience.

Such a methodological approach makes it clear that there is indeed nothing like a monolithic external “state”, which is outside the realities of the local people, as discussed in the introduction, but that the state and state politics have to be, of course, understood as socially embedded.

“State” here, and in the following, is understood as the “structural effect” (Mitchell 1991:95) which, governmental prescriptions, institutions, laws and corresponding practices have on people’s everyday lives and local realities.<sup>11</sup> Although “the state” gets negotiated, re-interpreted and appropriated on

---

<sup>8</sup> Other responsibilities are – just to name a few - identifying appropriate beneficiaries and projects for the available government schemes, application for and management of the latter, joint management of village resources (e.g. land, forest, water, irrigation, fisheries etc.), sanitation, rural housing schemes, adult literacy campaigns, electricity, all infrastructure development initiatives, identification of BPL-families, ration cards and ration shops, birth / death registers, issuing of birth, marriage, death, school etc. certificates, distribution of scholarships, village fairs, Food for Work Programmes, ensuring “communal harmony” etc.

<sup>9</sup> The frequency of gram panchayat- or gram sabha meetings may vary from state to state. Also there is no complete uniformity in the actual responsibilities. Considerable scope for interpreting is left to the respective state governments.

<sup>10</sup> Others could be for instance extensionists, bureaucratic, NGO, local elites, political parties, women’s groups, castes’-panchayat (representatives) and in a more general sense dominant and alternative local discourses etc. However, all of these forms of knowledge are of course no homogeneous fixed and clearly defined entities, but rather are produced and reproduced in an ongoing process by the different interacting social actors.

<sup>11</sup> Examples for such practices could be e.g. the implementation of certain programmes, execution of laws, state monopoly in legitimate violence, the way law and order is observed, bureaucratic procedures, reservations due to caste or gender etc.

the local level, it continues, nonetheless, as an “external, discrete entity” in the perception of most of the people. This has certainly to do with the perception that putative state’s logics, on basis of which laws and prescription seem to be formulated and pursued, draw to a great extent from bodies of knowledge that are not commonly available at the local level or rather are perceived as ‘alien’ to local realities.

### *Panchayat as a Gendered Political Arena*

Before I will start discussing some of my empirical material, let me start by introducing in some more detail the political arena, where most of the in the following discussed negotiation processes take place.

Political arena will be understood in the following, by applying Bierschenk, as a complex milieu of knowledgeable social actors with different interests, resources and action logics (1999:57) competing for power to enrol others in their ‘projects’ (Long 1992:22). A social actor, or agent, thereby, is considered a rational human being and as being both, knowledgeable about choices from which he or she can draw as well as of being actually capable of making such choices.

A social agent is choosing selectively, both consciously and unconsciously, from different discourses, available cultural constructions and strategies to give meaning to her or his social reality and to attain her or his aims. Agency, thereby, is the ability of a social actor to process social experiences and to develop strategies to actively design her or his own life. Even in extremely subordinated positions and under coercion, social actors still dispose of some power and are never just victims of structural constraints or at complete mercy of other actors’ arbitrary will (Giddens 1984, Long 1992).

Starting from such an approach, it is no longer possible to understand villagers as passive recipients of governmental intervention. Rather they have to be understood as “(...) active participants who process information and strategize in their dealings with various local actors as well as outside institutions and personnel” (Long 1992:21).

A political arena is conceptualized as without fixed boundaries, but as flexible and porous. The integration to other political arenas happens through brokers (like e.g. local bureaucrats, village secretaries, NGO workers, politicians etc.) or overlapping political fields (e.g. state level or national politics) (Bierschenk 1999:47). The gram panchayat can be understood as an interface of such overlapping political arenas, where local, governmental and other political logics are negotiated.

However, the dynamics within the political arena and even more within the political field can be planned only in very limited ways by the participants, but are rather to be understood as results of the strategic and rational acting of individual and collective political actors (ibid.).

Political arenas are not empty socio-political “no-man’s-land” on which democratic institutions can be imposed. Forcing new modes of governance by state intervention (e.g. as done by 73<sup>d</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment) upon the local arena leads to an adding up of competing power-centres - or as Bierschenk puts it “to a sedimentation of political institutions” (1999:51). Due to the relatively limited

norm setting capacities of the distant state at the local level, an overnight replacement of previous practices is not viable and the maturing of a "democratic culture" has to be a long process (ibid.).

Therefore, contrarily to the hopes of state planners, national bureaucrats, civil society activists, but also academics, the latest state intervention, i.e. the 33% women quota, is of course interactively negotiated and partly reinterpreted before it is integrated, in a modified form, into the existing day to day practices. To perceive such dynamics as the apparent "failure of the state" to implement the reformed panchayat regulations means actually to ignore the social embeddedness of politics and the state.

If one acknowledges the latter expectation as a misconception in the first place, many studies on the new "panchayats' performances" and listing of the local communities' shortcomings seem tautological or adhering to merely identifying symptoms of the "failure". Instead it should be accepted that (Western) democratic ideals, as incorporated in the amendments, are (at least) partly discrepant to local realities and that there has been a historical continuity of excluding certain groups from the execution of political power. Some of those local social institutions, targeted or affected by the reforms (as e.g. gender-relations, caste relations and local authorities<sup>12</sup>) may actually fundamentally contradict the equality-claims of democracy and thus will not be accepted uncontested.

Note, that the political arena is not a gender neutral space but that those parts of the political domain which are commonly perceived as "politics" are structured above all according to the dominant, male discourse. It is within this discourse that women get constructed as ignorant and unfit to do politics and ideals about a certain gendered division of labour, including women's exclusion from politics, get reproduced. That there are already female political spaces in the village community, is either ignored or their existence is devalued if not ridiculed.<sup>13</sup>

However, with the prescribed quotas and thus women being pushed forward into the local political arena, the different political actors are compelled to negotiate and attribute new meanings to 'politics' and 'how one does politics'. In the long run both women and men will have to accept, that not only women "have to change" if they want to become accepted in "politics", but that the local political arena, if not the meaning of "politics", i.e. the way politics is constructed and structured by institutionalized expectations has to transform (Lachenmann 1996).

### **III. Transforming and Appropriating the Political Space**

A very common perception of women who enter local governance because of quota interventions in Uttar Pradesh is that the majority of these women stay "proxies" or "puppets", acting according to the strings pulled by their husbands or other male "political guardians".<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> e.g. lambadar, caste panchayat elders, patrons, pradhans of the previous panchayat model, politicians and their local 'muscles' etc.

<sup>13</sup> Examples for already existing female political spaces could be: women's groups, cooperatives, balwadis, certain female information networks, NGO run activities and above all new political spaces emerging with the prescribed women's participation in local politics and even inroads and coalitions (mostly beyond the local panchayat) with other women panchayat members, but also with higher ranking bureaucrats and / or politicians.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. e.g. Aziz 2000, Bhaskar 2001, Bavishkar 2004, Das 1999, Gawankar 1993, Mohanty 1995, 2004, Palanithurai 2000, Ram 1987, Tekchandani, Jyoti and Sharma 1997, Wolkowitz 1987, YVS 1999, Hust 2001.

Although, indeed, not so many negotiation processes take place during the panchayat meetings – for the simple reason that hardly any women attend these meetings – the political space is transformed ever so subtly.

Regardless the potential critique the “proxy-pradhan” example may not be fitting with the “interface”-approach, I take exactly this extreme example to show that nonetheless new social spaces for the negotiation of gender expectations as well as the construction of politics emerge, but also to show that the “interface panchayat” is not to be localized in the panchayat meeting alone.

At the same time I want to distance myself from the widely used “proxy” terminology because of empirical evidence, but as I have discussed elsewhere for methodological reasons (Strulik 2003).

The widely used “Proxy”- perspective tends to stress the dependency of the elected woman on her (male) “political guardian” – which is in most of the cases her husband – in whatever work she is doing and whatever decisions she is making. Depending on who is speaking this is interpreted as ‘a failure of the woman herself to claim her rights and become actively involved in local politics’ or alternatively it is regarded as ‘the only way local governance can function, because women are ignorant and just not capable of playing the political game’ or as ‘the omnipotent social structure of Indian patriarchal society, which is at work’.

The dependency and thus the power relation of wife and husband concerning participation in local politics is depicted as highly disadvantageous for women and as exclusively dominated by the husbands. If one, however, considers both, elected woman and husband, as ‘knowledgeable’ social agents (Giddens 1984) the concept of puppets becomes difficult to maintain.

Let us look for instance at Manju Devi<sup>15</sup> and how she appropriates at least parts of the political space, but who, for many, would be the ideal example for a ‘proxy’:

Manju is a upper-caste Rajput woman in her mid-forties from an Eastern Uttar Pradesh village. Manju has never been to any of the panchayat meetings, in fact, since her in laws are observing purdah she has hardly left the house after her marriage, and the majority of the villagers – and even she herself – will tell that all political activities are managed by her husband.

All the village men and most of the village women, including Manju herself are convinced that this is the right way to deal with these “silly reservations”, because her husband, so it is assumed, is so much better disposed to deal with village matters.

However, Manju, who initially rather was against her nomination has taken a vivid interest in what is going on the panchayat level. Initially she was against her nomination, because she was very apprehensive about “dirty politics” and feared that she and her name might get blacken for things, which will be done in her name and which may not be ‘right’. She was not beaten or coerced into signing her nomination paper as maybe one would expect from a ‘proxy’, but she negotiated and played her cards right so that her husband finally agreed to at least share with her what is going on outside. Her rationales for agreeing to get nominated were finally her husband’s “happiness” and her family’s status as well as the possibility to influence local politics in her family’s interests.

During the election campaign her husband makes her talk inside the house, to a group of selected male and female relatives and fictive “village”-relatives. However, of course she can not take part in the outside campaigning which she leaves to her husband and other male

---

<sup>15</sup> Name changed.

family members. After she wins the election her returning husband offers her many thanks and ceremoniously puts a flower garland around her neck.

When she is talking about the panchayat work done, she refers to it as "work done by us" and thus clearly associates with her "outside representation" through her husband.

About two years "into politics" she perceives the panchayat work rather as "social work" and service to "her brothers and sisters" and distances it from what she still perceives as 'dirty politics'.

Since Manju got elected, she tries to stay informed by talking and questioning all people coming to her house, mostly women or younger relatives, but even by using her children to get hold of information and other peoples' views. Being herself a school drop out, she went through some panchayat manuals with the help of her daughter, because she felt she should know some things about "what all this panchayat thing is about" and the different schemes and procedures at the panchayat's disposal.

She had to leave the house and "purdah has become a little bit open" because it was necessary to go to the bank and also she had to go to the block office a couple of times to sign some papers. However, "purdah also had become less open" than she had initially expected. But Manju seems to be rather indifferent about that and enjoys whatever small exciting opportunities had come up and is not interested in challenging and pushing things further.

The panchayat's secretary (the lowest official in the bureaucratic hierarchy) is happy to deal with her husband alone and only interacts with Manju when he needs her signature. Although it is very difficult for Manju to oppose her husband she has so far refused to sign blank papers.

Village women are coming to Manju's house to speak to her, because they are afraid or rather "too shy" to interact directly with her husband. On their behalf Manju then talks to her husband and tries to make him understand their concerns, be it widow pension, domestic violence, alcohol abuse, the consideration for BPL schemes, water problems or the need for a balwadi (kindergarten).

She has a corner in the angan (inner courtyard) where she meets the women – which, with some goodwill, one could describe as her "office".

Manju is proud that she can do something for the women at all and knows that her mediator role is important. She likes to be addressed as 'pradhanji' and enjoys that even the other women in the house call her teasingly pradhanji. She points happily out that everybody in the village knows her name and not only as "wife of xy".

Together with the other women of the extended family, especially her sisters in law, but also with the visiting women, she likes to chat and gossip extensively about whatever village news come in, or about the problems confided to her by other village women – thus rechecking and shaping her views in the discussions with the others.

Whenever she gets a chance, Manju "spies" from behind the saree-purdah, which crosses the angan, on her husband's meetings with other men or on other male family members discussing village politics.

She is aware that her husband's honour and standing in the village depends on her 'good behaviour' and she also knows that he would be stuck if she would refuse to sign the panchayat papers.

Manju would never do anything against her husbands direct wish, but when in doubt about his approval, her strategy is not to ask him in the first place, but rather to try to manipulate things in subtle ways by 'being nice to him' or by involving third parties, e.g. other family members.

Manju and her husband usually discuss politics, and the village women's concerns at night in bed. Because of gender segregation decreed by purdah ideals like "respect", "honour" and "decency", this is the only space, where she can talk to her husband – thus rendering the most 'private' into a locus for village politics, i.e. the 'public'.

So, finally it appears that it is not so clear at all to decide, who actually manipulates whom. Even though her agency is extremely limited, Manju has edged out her ways to influence decisions. It



depends on how she advocates, and if she decides to take up at all forward a woman's request. Through her, previously unheard women are getting a voice. The fact that she has managed at all, to be listened to on these village matters constitutes in this context a dramatic change in gender relations.

She acts rational on her own agenda trying to extent her agency within the possible. She is aware of the limits of her agency, but has developed strategies to negotiate subtle redefinitions of existing gender relations and has successfully created new rooms to maneuver for herself within these limits and thus cannot be dismissed as being "merely a proxy" for her husband.

Moreover, even in this most limited case of a "purdah –pradhan" the following subtle changes in the construction of the political arena and the meaning of politics occur:

#### *The Social Construction of the Notion of Politics*

Politics is generally perceived as "no real work", "not honest", as a predominantly male, potentially dangerous gamble for influence and power.

Despite being very much part of the political and state system, the work of a pradhan is perceived as outside of this political sphere and is invested with the positive connotation of "charity work" or "service to the society". Being pradhan is "caring for the village community" which is described – despite caste and religious barriers – as extended (fictive) family.

#### *Creation of new, female political spaces*

Whereas 'purdah pradhans' indeed remain vastly excluded from dominate parts of local politics, they also monopolize one part of the political cake exclusively for themselves. By purdah prescriptions men have to stay clear of the corner of the angan were discussions take place with village women, where opinions are formed and which constitute a platform to address women specific problems and to exchange ideas. It is then the task of the woman pradhan to mediate the outcomes via her husband to the male political sphere. Thus "alternative publics" (Frazer 1992, Dhanda 2000) or female political spaces get linked to the dominant, almost exclusively male, political space. The woman pradhan has thereby some powers to manipulate the outcome of certain cases and requests put forward to her by the village women. However, it is also apparent that these new female political spaces are short in various resources to implement made decisions and are not taken serious by the male political players.

#### *Knowledge-Systems and Information-Networks*

Manju made three different, very limited, inroads into male knowledge-systems:

For one, by means of direct interaction with her husband and his sharing ideas and experiences, she gets hold on new ideas, concepts and information. But the husband, because of his monopoly, continues to control his wife's access to information and thus has the power to manipulate her perceptions and her formation of opinion.

His gendered ideas about how much is necessary and appropriate for a wife to know and how much she should be involved, define the tight rope walk of how much support he asks from his wife, but also the extent of interference he tolerates.

Second, Manju may access male knowledge systems by observation. Be it by spying on the discussion rounds of visiting men from behind the curtain or by listening in on conversations of male family members or even by observing what is going on from the roof terrace.

Thirdly, the most important change certainly is the end to the hitherto isolation due to the visiting women and thus the influx (but also production) of new ideas and various information. Through interaction with the visiting women local female knowledge-systems get tapped, as well reflexively expanded. In addition, certain difficulties and problems are not longer perceived as individual experiences or even personal failures, but can be related to a bigger societal context and coping strategies are exchanged.

#### *Democratic Ideals vs. Democratic Practice*

Manju's case has shown that there is a huge gap between the democratic ideals – as proclaimed with the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments – and the local practice. As I have showed above, the local political arena is not an empty space, but the state's prescriptions of course get negotiated and appropriated in contention with other (local) discourses. I argue that the observable discrepancy between ideals / prescriptions and local practices (Drèze and Sen 2002) has its roots mainly in the particular way gender is constructed in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and, related to that, the ideals and institutionalized expectations of purdah and gender segregation.

The local state's complacency thereby makes it all the more difficult to challenge existing gender expectations and to implement women's political participation as demanded by the amendments. The very bureaucrats, who actually are supposed to enact the state if not are constructed as embodying and representing "the state" are in fact just one political player amongst others and equally grounded in local realities.

The collaboration of husbands and officials in sidelining the elected women is symptomatic. Most of the officials are from the higher castes themselves and come from families where purdah is observed. One secretary justified his working with the husband and not taking initiative to involve the woman-pradhan as follows:

"These reservations are impossible to combine with our culture, the government does not know anything about our life here. I know that if I would be the pradhan, I wouldn't send my wife out to do the work either. Because, she would not be able to do the work, she doesn't understand anything about this work, about schemes and politics, you know, she is not educated nor is she interested in politics. Even if she would learn to know, how will she talk to the villagers? Me and my family would become a joke. People would talk very bad about our family, how advanced we are. They would not give the due respect to my wife and our family – how could I tolerate that?. (...) Here men always have been pradhans and good at it – why should it be changed? – (...) If I would have to work with a woman pradhan, I would work double as long, explaining each and every bit to her."

Other husbands stated, contrarily, that they would in fact welcome a change and would not begrudge their wives to come "forward" and get involved in "something more interesting".

But even these purportedly progressive husbands acknowledged that it is "just not possible" because they do not get any support in this from the officials and the villagers. Some husbands I spoke to were in fact asking for more governmental pressure to implement the reservations so that they would get the legitimization to defend themselves vis-à-vis family elders and villagers to lift purdah practices. One husband of a woman panchayat member summed up nicely the difficulties and social pressures for potentially progressive families to end the "pradhan-pati-business" as follows:

"This is all a question of pressure. If somebody would pressure me, I would send my woman happily to the meetings. But without outside pressure I can not do it. If I can't say 'hey listen, I have to send her', people will start talking very bad behind my back... 'ohhooo, they have become so much forward now...they have forgotten what are good manners' (...)

Society has to change before I can send her -- if I am forced to send her, best it would be if even the villagers themselves would insist. Then people couldn't blame me...or her...they then will have asked for it themselves...or at least the police or whomever."

### *To Challenge or Not to Challenge...*

Surprisingly, Manju, and many other women of the purdah-pradhan type I spoke to did not exploit their power of signature etc. to bargain for additional liberties or to further their interests.

It seems that the women are extremely careful not to challenge purdah or other gendered societal expectations in a too radical way, in order not to endanger those, carefully carved out (small) new rooms to maneuver. The "happiness of the family" is so inherently interwoven with one's own "happiness" that preserving this "happiness" by not pushing demands and challenges too far, becomes paramount.

### *New Identity*

Those small extensions of rooms to maneuver, the attained access to new information networks and thus the feeling of being knowledgeable and capable in previously non-experienced ways as well as the respect received from village women - or even from family members - result in a higher self-esteem.

Particularly formative is the experience to have one's own public identity, i.e. of being known by one's own name by the whole village or by possessing even a bank-account in one's own name.

However, Manju, similar to most of the purdah pradhans I talked to, identifies strongly with her husband's performance as pradhan. But she also recognizes her own part in it: It is only through her name and her playing along that her husband gets the legitimacy for his political career - for one due to her actual political participation (signing, talking to the women, having a bank account etc.) but also by not ruining the family's honour by stretching new-found liberties too far.

### *Changing Gender Relations*

Without the state prescribed women's quota, incidences as the following would have been, in the same context of purdah observing families, unthinkable:

Women interacting directly with their husbands or other men in public (or rather, as in Manju's case in "the semi-public" of the "male-side" of the saree curtain inside their houses (- from which the other not elected women of the house continue to be excluded of) would not have happened.

Another novelty is the incidence when Manju's receives a flower garland from her husband after the electoral victory and thus the institutionalized hierarchical way of husband – wife relation gets reversed for a moment.

Also Manju's, albeit very limited, inroads into the male political sphere – or one may even say her partial appropriation of the previously exclusively male political domain by creating own female political spaces (be it the consultation hours for village women, or her mediation and political discussions at night in bed) can be understood as, an albeit subtle, alteration in gender relations.

### **III. Negotiating with the state at the interface PRI**

The changes in gender relations as well as the transformation of the political space in the above case of Manju may seem to many really small and limited. Therefore my second example, Vandana Devi, is a pradhan from Himachal Pradesh, where even the most critical observers will have to acknowledge that the political arena got transformed since her tenure.

With the reconstruction of Vandana Devi's narrative below, I will focus on how she draws skillfully from different discourses and how she employs the support from not only bureaucrats but a whole range of different political actors, and thus avails herself of different, gendered, information networks to serve her purpose. In addition her story will highlight how certain state's prescription, if they get governmentally enforced, as well as accessible and supportive bureaucrats can alleviate women's political participation.

Vandana Devi is in her early forties and from a relatively well-to-do scheduled caste family, living in a Himalayan village, not far from the Pathankot Mandi highway. Vandana stays with her husband and 3 children independently from her in-laws, in a big house amid their own rice fields. Vandana's husband is a government employee at the electricity board and "not interested in politics".

Vandana, although she portrays herself as a naïve and simple woman, is nonetheless a skilled self-presenter who is the embodied success-story of her block and quite used to "tell her story".

What is typical in her political trajectory if compared to other "successful" women-pradhans is that she starts long before she actually gets elected to establish a "public identity". By moving in different social spaces she gradually builds up varied information- and support-networks.

Vandana, who is also a school drop out and married at the age of 15, started her political career by becoming active in women's groups. She was encouraged to do so by an elder Rajput woman, Pramila Devi, from a neighbouring panchayat, who is very active in party politics and who was at that time busy establishing her own political career. Despite an age difference of about 20 years and in spite of caste barriers a friendship develops and Pramila becomes in many way Vandana's mentor and her gatekeeper to the larger political field.

Getting more and more experienced Vandana eventually founds several self-help-groups herself and interacts with other women's groups beyond the Districts boundaries and attends different governmental and NGO trainings.

Vandana discovers that reading, writing and account keeping are crucial skills for her work and her daughters teach to her whatever they are learning in school. About 10 years before she gets elected the pradhan, she, the once illiterate woman, becomes the governmental literacy campaigner and teacher for the adult literacy programme.

By the time she gets elected Vandana is known by everybody for her endless commitment to teach to all those who missed their chance as children. She spends her days traveling from one panchayat to the other and is well informed about all the gossip, but also about what is going on in the panchayats and the respective development initiatives.

In 2000, Vandana gets introduced to the MLA's wife by her female longtime mentor who by now has become (by quota) the Block Development Committee (BDC)'s president.<sup>16</sup> Under the initiative of the MLA and his wife, a couple of women meet in the MLA's living room to discuss how to get nominated and the MLA shares "the tricks of the trade" for a successful election campaign.

Vandana's husband, similar to Vandana herself, is rather apprehensive about joining "dirty politics", but Vandana's grown-up daughters encourage their mother to give it a try.

During the election campaign she keeps canvassing in 'all-women-teams' consisting mostly of her daughters, the women from the women's groups and women who attended her literacy classes. In Vandana's own portrayal she eventually wins the election because people "already know her as honest, dedicated and hardworking".

A female secretary is assigned to her, which according to her makes a huge difference in the daily political work and she feels at ease with that woman. But also her husband prefers, for obvious reasons, the secretary to be a woman, since Vandana has to spend quite some time alone with the secretary, with whom she occasionally has to hike from village to village.<sup>17</sup>

Vandana, having worked the panchayat as a literacy campaigner for many years, already has quite a substantial knowledge about political processes and village affairs when she gets elected. Whatever she does not know is explained to her by the woman-secretary, but she attends also, together with all other newly elected male and female pradhans of the Block, a five-day training programme provided by the government.

Despite her "landslide-win" in the election, the first years of her tenure are characterized by many difficulties. Vandana's first "big project" is the touchstone for the local elite if she will "co-operate" and will do politics in the "approved traditional way" (i.e. misappropriating and sharing funds amongst the panchayat members and local elites who are involved in the contractors' businesses). Vandana's refusal to employ workers through contractors in the process of building a panchayat bhawan (office building) and thus her undermining of established networks for appropriating governmental funds, enrages the local (male) elite. Consequently, the newly dug fundament of the bhawan gets mysteriously, again and again, flooded with water over night. The fundament can be only completed after Vandana and her son start a nightly vigil.

Next, a rumour campaign is started which constructs her as "ignorant" of the government schemes and wasting money due to her unorthodox 'botched' and 'amateurish' way of going about her work. Moreover, ironically enough, now her opponents turn the tables and accuse her of misappropriating money. People are doubly furious that a low caste woman ignores their demands, but has the guts to sit with them in the meeting and even dares to talk back to them. Fortunately, Vandana is self-confident enough to believe in her own capabilities and working style. Still, Vandana's work becomes more and more like running the gauntlet and the side-swipes turn out to be increasingly nasty.

When it becomes unbearable, Vandana finally seeks help from the Block Development Officer (BDO). However, although she negotiates and threatens with her resignation, he turns out to be particularly helpful. Vandana acknowledges that because "he is a man and a Rajput himself" he probably has to stay true to his old networks and caste allegiances.

Next Vandana asks her old friend and mentor Pramila Devi for help. Together they discuss the problems with the women's groups; the latter promise to turn up at the next panchayat meeting, ready to intervene.

---

<sup>16</sup> The BDC is at the mezzo-level of the 3 tier panchayat system. The pendant in UP would be the Kshetra Panchayat. The highest level would be in both states the Zilla Parishad at the district level.

<sup>17</sup> Due to the sparse population and small number of inhabitants a gram panchayat in Drang Block in HP consists of an average of 10 to 15 small hamlets. Visiting different parts of the panchayat can mean up to 2 hours hiking through forests and fields.

Simultaneously, Vandana by-passes the local bureaucrat nepotism and travels to the state capital to meet with the ruling party's women's commissioner whom she knows through Pamila. This women's commissioner ensures that the District Collector gets informed and that the latter then cautions in return the BDO who is again instructed to hand down this caution to the male, high-caste trouble shooters in the village – an order to which the BDO eventually grudgingly complies.

Two years on from that incidence not all the tensions could be solved, but since Vandana's tenure, substantial development (e.g. the panchayat bhawan, a road, a couple of paved paths, an annexure to the local school building, about 10 dry wells (bhaurhi) etc.) has been brought to the area and it is becoming more and more difficult for her opponents to construct her as an incapable or ignorant misfit.

Vandana still uses the support of her women's groups as pressure group and in return tries to advocate and promote the women's interest in the panchayat meetings and encourages the women to get involved in Gram Sabha meetings. Vandana shapes her opinion and strategies especially in discussions with her women's groups members.

Both village women and men are contacting her during her "office-hours" in the panchayat bhawan, but most of them prefer to contact her at home.

Vandana is of course attending all the village meeting, where, as typical for HP, a special, distinctive chair and a table (at which only she and the secretary are entitled to sit) give her a certain authority. All others sit, whatever caste or gender, at the same level on chairs. The number of chairs is limited according to the actual members so that it becomes more difficult to sideline women or low caste members by consuming all the space and attention.

Vandana, similar to all members and pradhans in HP, receives a honorarium for every meeting attended. The secretary in her and in other HP panchayats makes sure that it is only paid to those who are actually attending the meetings themselves. Although this honorarium is rather (appreciated) "pocket money" for Vandana, for poor women it is approx. half of the monthly income of a day-labourer and thus a substantial source of income.

Vandana continues to stay in constant exchange with Pramilla Devi who keeps her posted about what is happening in the BDC meetings. Both, her regular exchange with local women's group as well as the close contact to the BDC vice president and through her with different (including male) party-politician are extremely valuable resources of additional information about what is happening in the different political arenas. Through Pramilla, Vandana keeps informed what decisions recently were made at the block level and what kind of new schemes will be available soon. Thereby, it is a crucial plus-point in the process of getting funds sanctioned to have a strong supporter w i t h i n the BDC.

#### *Governmental Training and Social construction of Ignorance:*

Women, who enter politics due to reservations, are exposed to enormous *legitimization pressure*. They are perceived as incapable and face manifold hostilities, above all, from previous stakeholders who fear to loose their influence, but also from a rather skeptical local community.

Even the comparatively politically well-versed Vandana has to continuously counter villagers' open suspicion, insinuations and accusations that she is not capable of doing their work "properly".

The public scrutiny just seems to wait for them to stumble and to make a mistake in order to have the argumentative against women in politics and against the overall 'not wanted' reservations.

Since a common strategy to dismantle women panchayat electives is to construct them as ignorant and incapable, governmentally provided trainings (as Vandana for instance attended one) are important to take away the basis for such these allegations. However, note, it is also necessary to

realize that people are successful to construct women as “ignorant” only because they exaggerate the importance of (male) formal political knowledge, whereas women of course are knowledgeable as well – only that their stocks of knowledge are constructed as less relevant (Lachenmann 1996).

I do not argue that training programmes are not required, but I think it is important to realize that governmental and NGO run initiatives follow in fact the above dominant male discourse and tend to start from what one should call a „deficiency“ approach. Most of the times these programmes focus on women’s lack of education, lack of information, lack of economic resources, lack of time, lack of experience, lack of integration into political networks and lack in toughness and scrupulousness etc. and neglect to point out and encourage women’s existing knowledge and strengths. In my view, approaches, which concentrate only on “capacity building” are thus dangerously reductive and are not taking into account the social constructiveness of dimensions like gender, but also “knowledge” or “politics”.

#### *Additional State Regulations*

Despite the above warning of reducing women’s chances and abilities of participation to be based on ‘formal political and administrative knowledge’ alone, training workshops are of course necessary and enable women to also access these fields of (formal) knowledge. These workshops, moreover, offer a platform to exchange experiences with other women electives. In the same vein manuals in the vernacular for later reference, but also to offer authoritative written prove that one is acting correctly and on the side of the laws may enable women to negotiate their way of doing politics.

In addition provisions by the Himachal state government like for e.g. panchayat bhawans, “prestigious chairs” ,an office-table for the pradhan, chairs according to the actual number of elected members, a honorarium etc. certainly creates an encouraging framework and may force open certain forms of institutionalized hierarchies and exclusion.

Interestingly the state in Uttar Pradesh does not even try to alleviate women’s political participation by the above, or similar, additional regulations. Also there is less pressure from district or state officials on the local bureaucrats to insist on women’s participation and to stay accessible and resourceful to women. However, most interesting in the case of Himachal Pradesh is that the state’s additional regulations and stricter instructions get not distorted and re-interpreted to the extent that they might get in UP.

#### *Heterogeneous Gendered Support-Structures*

For Vandana’s successful entry into local politics it is significant that she did not start from zero public involvement. It is rather a continuous process of becoming gradually more involved with matters outside the family, of *progressively building up a public personality* and extending one’s heterogeneous *support networks*<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Heterogeneous as complex, on different levels, overlapping, including formal and informal, male and female support structures. For instances *male*: husband, son, men trained in literacy campaign, MLA, District Collector, predominantly male party structures. But also *female*: daughters, women from women’s groups, village women trained in literacy campaign, women Block officials for literacy campaign, woman-secretary, MLA’s wife, Pramila Devi, State’s Women’s Commissioner.

With help of this complex and diverse support structures Vandana succeeds in accessing and connecting both female and male knowledge- and information-systems and varied discursive resources. She opens new rooms to maneuver on different levels (formal and informal, family / friendship based, but also from higher formalized / professionalized politics) which are integrated and negotiated through her at the panchayat level.

#### *Transformation of the Political Space*

That Vandana integrates all these different social actors and knowledge-systems in the panchayat transforms the political arena. Especially her "naïve" way to refuse "sharing" development funds with the local elites, challenges and changes the way "local politics is done" and undercuts the prevailing male nepotism and its exclusive claim to mean "politics". But also her way of interacting with people makes a difference. Probably, the major change is the way in which she involves the Mahila Mandal and SCG women in the political process by getting them locally acknowledged as her pressure group, by discussing village matters with them, by getting feedback from them on her own performance as well as taking up their suggestions. Thereby, both, the local agenda setting process but also the implementation of local infrastructural development measurement are getting engendered.

That Vandana succeeds in asserting herself as a capable pradhan in integrating female knowledge and support systems and thus different political fields, can be seen as a big success. That she eventually get her way done and is excepted as a political actor, demonstrates that at the interface panchayat gender relations are challenged and (re-) negotiated.

#### **IV: Conclusions**

The paper started by making a case for an actor oriented approach, focusing on the interface panchayat as a locus for negotiating the state. With the 33% women's quota as prescribed in the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment, I took exemplarily one state intervention and discussed it with respect to both, it's negotiation and re-interpretation and sometimes "distorted" appropriation by the local political actors and subsequently regarding its prospects and limitation for changing the structuration of the political space and with respect to changing gender relations.

The paper has shown that by using the interface concept and an actor oriented approach it is possible to capture and analyze the actual p r o c e s s of the "state's blurring with society" which provides a much richer picture and starting point for further research than 'inventories' stills of "state failures" and "panchayat- or women-pradhan's performances".

I have also shown that there is more than just one political actor (e.g. bureaucrats) participating in the negotiation process and hence the process involves much more complex, varied and competing action rationales than often considered.

One of the main arguments is that despite the 'distortion', or rather the appropriation through a process of negotiation, the state may change local realities by inducing dialogues and negotiation processes, in course of which, new rooms to maneuver open up and women's chance to both get



hitherto alternative (female) political spaces integrated with the formal political space increases. Thereby, the distinction as observed in this paper between creation of new female (alternative) political spaces (as in Manju's case) and extension of public / political rooms to maneuver (as in Vandana's case) is not an "either – or"-development, but of course an interwoven and mixed process. By these processes the dominant discourse, including the meaning of "politics" and "the state" eventually is re-shaped. I argue, that the state intervention "women's quota" can indeed become 'a weapon in the hand of women in struggle over the meaning of politics' (Long 1992:24) – a process which in turn reflexively influences the broader context of the social construction of gender. However, since the feminization of the political space is highly contested and the previous stakeholders will try to maintain power-imbalance in their favours, and also transforming dominant discourses and thus institutional change is a slow endeavour, it is just the beginning of a long process.

## References

- Aziz, Abdul 2000 Women in Local Governance: Field Experience from Karnataka. *Unpublished Paper*. Bangalore: Institute for Social and Economic Change.
- Afshar, Haleh, ed. 1987 Women, State and Ideology: Studies from Africa and Asia. London: MacMillan.
- Baviskar, B. S. 2003 Impact of Women's Participation in Local Governance in Rural India. Unpublished Paper Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi.
- Bhaskar, Manu 2001 Critical Evaluation of Experience of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. In: *Women in Panchayati Raj*, edited by Ambrose Pinto and Helmut Reifeld, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute
- Bailey, F.G. 1963 Politics and Social Change: Orissa in 1959. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Béteille, André 1965, 2002 The Distribution of Power. In: Vandana Madan, ed. *The Village in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Béteille, André 2002 Equality and Universality: Essays in Social and Political Theory. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Bierschenk, Thomas and Oliver d. Sardan 1999 Dezentralisierung und lokale Demokratie: Macht und Politik im ländlichen Bénin in den 80er Jahren. In: Jakob Rösel and Trutz v. Trotha, eds. *Dezentralisierung, Demokratisierung und die lokale Repräsentation des Staates: Theoretische Kontroversen und empirische Forschungen*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.
- Brass, Paul R. 1994 *The Politics of India since Independence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1997 *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Brown, Judith M. 1985 Modern India: *The Origins of an Asian Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Buch, Nirmala 2001 The 73rd Amendment and the Experience of Women in the New Panchayati Raj Institutions: A Critical Evaluation. In: Ambrose Pinto and Helmut Reifeld, eds. *Women in Panchayati Raj*. New Delhi: Indian Social Institute.
- Das, Anita 1999 *Experience with the Panchayat Law: The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and Rights of Women*. Unpublished paper presented at the "Women Farmers: Enhancing Rights and Productivity" Conference at Centre for Development Research, Bonn.
- Dhanda, Meena 2000 Representation for Women: Should Feminists Support Quotas? *Economic and Political Weekly* (August 12, 2000): 2969-2976.
- Drèze, Jean and Amartya Sen 2002 Democratic Practice and Social Inequality in India. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.
- Dumont, Luis 1966, 2000 The 'Village Community' from Munro to Maine. In: Vandana Madan, ed. *The Village in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Ekatra 2003 Women and Governance: Reimagining the State. New Delhi: EKATRA - Society for Development Alternatives for Women.
- Evans, P., D. Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol, ed. 1985 *Bringing the State Back In*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Frazer, Elizabeth 2002 Democracy, Citizenship and Gender. In: April Carter and Geoffrey Stokes, eds. *Democratic Theory Today*. Malden: Blackwell.
- Fuller, C. J. and Véronique Bénéï, eds. 2000 *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*. New Delhi: Social Science Press.

- Fuller, C. J. and John Hariss 2000 For an Anthropology of the Modern Indian State. In: C. J. Fuller and Véronique Béné, eds. *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*. New Delhi: Social Science Press.
- Gawankar, Rohini 1992 Role of Women in Panchayati Raj. In: *Women's Participation in Politics*, edited by Susheela Kaushik, New Delhi: Vikas.
- Gosh, Ratna, Alok K. Pramanik, and eds. 1999 Panchayat System in India: Historical, Constitutional and Financial Analysis. New Delhi: Kanishka.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1999 Women's Participation in Panchayats: Some Steps. In: Ratna Gosh and Alok K. Pramanik, eds. *Panchayat System in India: Historical, Constitutional and Financial Analysis*. New Delhi: Kanishka.
- Giddens, Anthony 1984 The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Girtler, Roland (1972) „Ist eine Demokratie ‚von unten‘ im Sinne Mahatma Gandhis überhaupt möglich?“. In: *ibid. Die ‚demokratische‘ Institution des Panchayat in Indien: Ein Vergleich des ‚gesetzlichen‘ und des ‚traditionellen‘ Panchayat*. Wien: Acta Ethnologica et Linguistica. (pp.60 – 75).
- Gupta, Akhil 1995 "Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics and the Imagined State". In: *American Ethnologist*, 22:375-402.
- Hust, Evelyn 2001 Political 'Empowerment' of Women through Legislation: A Case Study Orissa. In: Ambrose Pinto and Helmut Reifeld, eds. *Women in Panchayati Raj*. New Delhi: Indian Social Institute.
- Jessop, Bob 2001 Bringing the State Back in (Yet Again): Reviews, Revisions, Rejections and Redirections. *International Review of Sociology*, 1 (2001).
- Kaviraj, Sudipta 1991 On State, Society and Discourse in India. In: J. Manor, ed. *Rethinking Third World Politics*. London: Longman.
- Klimkeit, Hans Joachim 1981 *Der Politische Hinduismus: Indische Denker zwischen religiöser Reform und politischem Erwachen*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Kothari, Rajni, ed. 1970 *Caste in Indian Politics*. New Delhi: Orient Longman.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2001 The Crisis of the Moderate State and the Decline of Democracy. In: Niraj G. Jayal, ed. *Democracy in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Kuhn, Berthold (1998) Panchayat – Reform lokaler Selbstverwaltung in Indien. In: *E + Z*, 39:9., pp. 241-243.
- Kumari, Abhilasha and Sabina Kidwai 1994 *Illusion of Power: The Women's Vote*. New Delhi: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Kurtz, Donald V. 2001 *Political Anthropology: Power and Paradigms*. Boulder: Westview.
- Lachenmann, Gudrun 1995 Internationale Frauenpolitik im Kontext von Globalisierung und aktuellen Transformationsprozessen. *Working Paper*. Bielefeld: University of Bielefeld.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1996 Transformationsprozesse in Westafrika - Widersprüche und Chancen für Frauenpolitik und Wandel der Geschlechterverhältnisse. *asien afrika lateinamerika* 24(1996):231-251.
- Lieten, G. K. and Ravi Srivastava 1999 *Unequal Partners: Power Relations, Devolution and Development in Uttar Pradesh*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Long, Norman 1992 From Paradigm Lost to Paradigm Regained? The Case for an Actor - Oriented Sociology of Development. In: Norman Long and Ann Long, eds. *Battlefields of Knowledge: The Interlocking of Theory and Practice in Social Research and Development*. London: Routledge.
- Long, Norman and Alberto Arce 1992 The Dynamics of Knowledge: Interfaces Between Bureaucrats and Peasants. In: Norman Long and Ann Long, eds. *Battlefields of Knowledge: The Interlocking of Theory and Practice in Social Research and Development*. London: Routledge.
- Madan, Vandana ed. 2002 *The Village in India* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Manor, J. ed. 1991 *Rethinking Third World Politics*. London: Longman.
- Mahapatra, Subhasini 2001 *Women and Politics*. New Delhi: Rajat Publications.
- Mathew, George 1994 Panchayati Raj: *From Legislation to Movement*. New Delhi: Concept.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2000 Panchayati Raj in India: An Overview. In: George Mathew and Nirmala Buch, eds. *Status of Panchayati Raj in the States and Union Territories of India 2000*. New Delhi: Concept.
- Mathew, George and Nirmala Buch, eds. 2000 *Status of Panchayati Raj in the States and Union Territories of India 2000*. New Delhi: Concept.
- Mayaram, Shail 2002 New Modes of Violence: The Backlash Against Women in the Panchayat System. In: Karin Kapadia, ed. *The Violence of Development: The Politics of Identity, Gender and Social Inequalities in India*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.
- Mishra, Anil D. and M. S. Dadage, eds. 2002 *Panchayati Raj: Gandhian Perspective*. New Delhi: Mittal.
- Mitchell, T. 1991 The Limits of the State Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics. *American Political Science Review*, 85:77-96.
- Mohanty, Bidyut 1996 Women's Empowerment and Panchayats. In: Bidyut Mohanty, ed. *Women and Political Empowerment: Proceedings of the Women's Political Empowerment Day Celebrations 1995*. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 2004 *Women's Empowerment in the Context of 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts*. ISS Occasional Paper: Institute of Sciences.
- Mukhopadhyay, Maitrayee 1998 Gender, Power and the State: Why Women Appeal to the State. In: *ibid.*, ed. *Legally Dispossessed: Gender Identity and the Process of Law*. Calcutta: Stree.
- Pai, Sudha 2000 Pradhanis in the New Panchayats: A Study from Meerut District. In: Kiran Saksena, ed. *Women and Politics*. New Delhi: Gyan.
- Parel, Anthony J., ed. 1999 *M.K. Gandhi: Hind Swaraj and other Writings*. New York: Routledge.
- Parikh, Kirit S. and R. Radhakrishna, eds. 2002 *India Development Report 2002*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Palanithurai, G 2000 Empowering Women Through Local Bodies: Experiences From Tamil Nadu. *Unpublished Paper* presented at the the Workshop "Women in Local Governance: Experiences and Effective Strategies in Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra", June 1-2, 2000, Bangalore: Institute of Social Studies Trust.
- Rajiv Gandhi Foundation 1997 *Revitalization of Panchayati Raj in India*. New Delhi: Rajiv Gandhi Foundation.
- Ram, Ahuja 1987 Political Awareness and Political Participation of Women in Rural Areas. *The Journal of Sociological Studies* 1(4th January 1987):14-26.
- Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1940) "Preface". In: M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, eds.: *African Political Systems*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Rudolph, Lloyd I. and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph 1967 *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sharma, Ramesh C. 1999 Panchayat in Indian History Through the Ages: The Case of Medieval India. In: Ratna Gosh and Alok K. Pramanik, eds. *Panchayat System in India: Historical, Constitutional and Financial Analysis*. New Delhi: Kanishka.
- Singh, Chandra B. P. 1999 Panchayat as Institution: Myth or Reality. In: Ratna Gosh and Alok K. Pramanik, eds. *Panchayat System in India: Historical, Constitutional and Financial Analysis*. New Delhi: Kanishka.
- Singh, Mahendra P. 1999 Panchayati Raj: Mandalization in the Era of Globalization. In: Ratna Gosh and Alok K. Pramanik, eds. *Panchayat System in India: Historical, Constitutional and Financial Analysis*. New Delhi: Kanishka.
- Singh, Raj 1998 Problems and Prospects of New Panchayati Raj Institutions. *Kurukshetra*, November 1998:5-7.
- Srinivas, M. N. 1962 *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*. Bombay: Asia Printing House.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987, 2002 *The Indian Village: Myth and Reality*. In: Vandana Madan, ed. *The Village in India* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Strulik, Stefanie 2001 *Training Women for Governance: Swayam Shikshan Prayog*. Bombay: Swayam Shikshan Prayog.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2003 *Against the Notion of „Proxies“: Women Pradhans in Himachal and Uttar Pradesh*. In: Mohanty, Bidyut, ed. *A Decade of Women's Empowerment through Local Government in India*. Workshop Report. New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences.
- Tekchandani, Bharti Kiran Jyoti, and Priti Sharma 1997 *They Call Me Member Saab: Women in Haryana Panchayati Raj*, New Delhi: MARG-Multiple Action Group.
- Trotha, Trutz v. and Jakob Rösel 1999 'Nous n'avons pas besoin d'Etat'. Dezentralisierung und Demokratisierung zwischen neoliberaler Modernisierungsforderung, Parastaatlichkeit und politischem Diskurs. In: Jakob Rösel and Trutz v. Trotha, eds. *Dezentralisierung, Demokratisierung und die lokale Repräsentation des Staates: Theoretische Kontroversen und empirische Forschungen*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.
- UNDP, Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, and et al. 2002 *Human Development Report 2002: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Vijayakumar, A. 1999 Panchayat System in India: An Overview. In: Ratna Gosh and Alok K. Pramanik, eds. *Panchayat System in India: Historical, Constitutional and Financial Analysis*. New Delhi: Kanishka.
- Vijayan, Alleyamma 2000 *Women in Local Governance: Experiences and Effective Intervention Strategies in Kerala*. Unpublished Paper presented at the the Workshop "Women in Local Governance: Experiences and Effective Strategies in Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra", June 1-2, 2000, Institute of Social Studies Trust, Bangalore.
- Vincent, Joan 1990 *Anthropology and Politics: Visions, Traditions and Trends*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Wolkowitz, Carol 1987 Controlling Women's Access to Political Power: A Case Study in Andhra Pradesh, India. In: Haleh Afshar, ed. *Women, State and Ideology: Studies from Africa and Asia*. London: MacMillan.
- Yuva Vikas Sansthan 1999 *Women Leadership in Panchayats in Ghazipur District*. Unpublished Paper, Mohamabad: YVS.