

ASSESSING THE ROLE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF SARPANCH AND DEPUTY SARPANCH IN RURAL GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

*The Panchayati Raj system plays a vital role in strengthening grassroots democracy and rural development in India. Sarpanch and Deputy Sarpanch, as key functionaries of Gram Panchayats, are central to planning and implementing various development initiatives. The present study was conducted in Navsari district of South Gujarat to assess the role perception and performance of these leaders. A total of 120 respondents, comprising 60 sarpanch and 60 deputy sarpanch from 60 randomly selected Gram Panchayats across six talukas, were interviewed using a structured schedule. Data were statistically analyzed by working out frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and correlation. Results revealed that a majority of respondents (sarpanch and deputy sarpanch) were female (55, 56.57 %) belonged to the middle age group (48.33, 58.33 %), had secondary-level education (58.33, 61.66 %) and engaged primarily in farming and allied occupations (45, 40 %). Both sarpanch and deputy sarpanch exhibited moderate levels of role perception (58.33, 65 %) and role performance (51.66 % for both). Education, mass media exposure, cosmo-politeness, self-confidence, social participation and participation in extension activities were significantly associated with role perception and performance of sarpanch ($r = 0.40-0.59^{**}$) and deputy sarpanch ($r = 0.36-0.72^{**}$). The findings highlight the importance of capacity building and training for enhancing leadership effectiveness at the village level. Strengthening these attributes among elected representatives can lead to more effective governance and holistic rural development.*

Keywords: Panchayati Raj, role perception, role performance, correlation

INTRODUCTION

India is the world's largest democracy, where power lies with the people through their right to vote and elect their representatives. Balwant Rai G. Mehta (1957) realized that people's participation is crucial for successful implementation of programs like Community Development Program and National Extension Services (Harikrishna et al., 2023). The state of Madras had started democratic decentralization as an experimental measure in his own way as early as 1957, which was further followed by other Indian states like Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. Nagaur in Rajasthan became the first district to fully adopt democratic decentralization in India (Anon., 2003). The term, 'Democratic decentralization' was not easily understood by people then. Hence, this entire three-tier administration process was renamed as "Panchayati Raj" which means a system of government. Under this system, Zila Panchayat is the apex body at the district level followed by Panchayat Samitis at Block level as second and Gram Panchayats at the lowest level. As a result of this constitutional amendment in 1992, whole world witnessed a significant development in the realm of Indian democracy.

Gujarat introduced Panchayati Raj system on 1st April, 1963. There are 33 district panchayats, 251 taluka panchayats and 13,936 gram panchayats covering 18,544 villages in the state (Anon., 2015). Navsari, prior to 1997 was a part of Valsad district but later on 2nd of October 1997, state government bifurcated them in two separate districts. There are 389 villages in Navsari and 368 gram panchayats. The performance of the elected leaders of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) i.e., sarpanch and deputy sarpanch is very crucial for their successful functioning and effective rural governance (Parmar et al., 2025). Hence, it is necessary to know about their perception towards their role and performance at grassroot level. Role perception is defined as the way in which sarpanch and deputy sarpanch think about or understand the work of gram panchayat and their duty while, role performance is the action or process of performing a task. Despite their crucial role in rural governance, limited empirical studies have examined the role perception and performance of sarpanch and deputy sarpanch in the selected area. Many of the existing studies have overlooked the interpersonal, socio-psychological and communication factors influencing their effectiveness. Therefore, there is a need to identify and analyze the

determinants affecting their leadership performance to strengthen rural governance and development.

OBJECTIVES

- (1) To study the profile of Sarpanch and Deputy Sarpanch
- (2) To assess the role perception of Sarpanch and Deputy Sarpanch towards their duty
- (3) To evaluate the role performance of Sarpanch and Deputy Sarpanch in performing their duties.
- (4) To analyze the relationship between the profile characteristics and the role perception and performance of Sarpanch and Deputy Sarpanch.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in 6 talukas of Navsari district in South Gujarat. Randomly 10 gram panchayats were selected from each taluka, thus making total number of selected gram panchayats as 60. From each of these gram panchayats, 60 sarpanch and deputy sarpanch were selected. Thus, a total of 120 respondents were studied. A relevant interview schedule was prepared and data were collected from them. The collected data was statistically analyzed to work out frequency, percentage, mean, correlation and standard deviation in order to draw conclusion.

This study is based on a positivist philosophy, as it aimed to objectively measure and analyze the role perception and performance of Panchayat leaders using quantifiable data. A deductive research approach was used where conclusions were drawn from existing theories and concepts of local governance. A quantitative methodological choice was followed, as the study primarily relied on numerical data and statistical analysis. The survey research strategy was used to collect data directly from the respondents through personal interviews. The study followed a cross-sectional time horizon, where data were collected at a single point of time to assess the prevailing conditions and relationships among the selected variables. The data collected using pre tested interview schedule were compiled, tabulated and analyzed using Microsoft Excel according to the objectives. Statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and coefficient of correlation were used to derive meaningful conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic profile of Sarpanch and Deputy Sarpanch

Data presented in table 01 revealed that 48.33 percent of the sarpanch belong to middle age group, followed

by 28.33 and 23.34 per cent in younger and older age group, respectively. Similarly, 58.33 per cent of the deputy sarpanch fell in middle age group, followed by 25.00 per cent in young age and 16.67 per cent in old age group. The results indicated that majority of the sarpanch and deputy sarpanch belonged to medium age group and they were mature enough to understand their duty.

Table 1 : Distribution of respondents according to age

(n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Young	17	28.33	15	25.00
2	Middle	29	48.33	35	58.33
3	Old	14	23.34	10	16.67

Table 02: Distribution of respondents according to gender

(n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Male	27	45.00	26	43.33
2	Female	33	55.00	34	56.67

It is clear from data in table 02 that 45.00 percent of the sarpanch were male and 55.00 per cent female, while among deputy sarpanch, 43.33 per cent were male and 56.67 per cent female. More number of female sarpanch and deputy sarpanch as compare to men is mainly due to the 50 per cent reservation for women in Gujarat. It is a good sign in the era of gender equality and woman empowerment and will facilitate better development of villages and country as a whole.

The data displayed in table 03 clearly indicates that 33.33 per cent of the sarpanch belonged to scheduled castes followed by 31.66 per cent, 23.35 per cent and 11.66 per cent in scheduled tribes, other castes and backward castes, respectively. Among deputy sarpanch, 36.67 per cent were from scheduled castes followed by 28.33 from other backward castes, 20.00 from scheduled tribes and 15.00 per cent from other castes. The results show that sufficient representation of each and every caste is given in gram panchayat while electing sarpanch and deputy sarpanch, which is a good sign for democratic country like India.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to caste
(n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Scheduled Tribes	19	31.66	12	20.00
2	Scheduled Castes	20	33.33	22	36.67
3	Other Backward Castes	07	11.66	17	28.33
4	Forward/ other castes	14	23.35	09	15.00

In terms of marital status, results indicated that majority of the sarpanch (88.33 per cent) as well as deputy sarpanch (71.66 per cent) were married and remaining unmarried (Table 04).

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to marital status
(n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Married	53	88.33	43	71.66
2	Unmarried	07	11.67	17	28.34
3	Widow	00	00.00	00	00.00
4	Widower	00	00.00	00	00.00

The data presented in table 05 clearly shows that 58.33 per cent sarpanch had secondary level of education followed by 33.33 per cent and 08.34 per cent had college and primary level of education, respectively. Table 6 and fig. 14 shows that 61.66 per cent deputy sarpanch had secondary level of education followed by 21.67 per cent and 16.67 per cent had college and primary level of education, respectively.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents according to education
(n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Primary	05	08.34	10	16.67
2	Secondary	35	58.33	37	61.66
3	College and above	20	33.33	13	21.67

Table 6: Distribution of respondents according to land holding
(n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Small	21	35.00	20	33.33
2	Medium	30	50.00	29	48.33
3	Large	09	15.00	11	18.34

It is evident from table 06 that 50.00 per cent of the sarpanch had medium land holding followed by 35.00 per cent having small and 15.00 per cent with large land holding, respectively. Similarly, 48.33 per cent of the deputy sarpanch had medium land holding while 33.33 per cent and 18.34 per cent deputy sarpanch had small and large land holdings, respectively. Being a farmer, they can have better ideas of agricultural development and the problems faced by the villages in agriculture and animal husbandry and accordingly they can help to the villagers in overall agricultural development.

Table 7: Distribution of respondents according to their family size
(n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Small	20	33.33	14	23.34
2	Medium	32	53.33	40	66.66
3	Large	08	13.34	06	10.00

Data in table 07 specifies that 53.33 per cent sarpanch in medium family group followed by 33.33 per cent and 13.34 per cent were in small and large family group, respectively. 66.66 per cent deputy sarpanch had belonged in medium family whereas, 23.34 per cent and 10.00 per cent in small and large family group, respectively. The data presented in table 8 and it is indicated that 86.66 per cent sarpanch belonged to joint family followed by 13.34 per cent belonged to nuclear family. While, 68.33 per cent deputy sarpanch included into joint family followed by 31.67 per cent included into nuclear family. It is clear that majority of respondents connected with joint family and concept of joint family is still continued in our Indian villages as well as our social system.

Table 8: Distribution of respondents according to their family type (n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Nuclear family	8	13.34	19	31.67
2	Joint family	52	86.66	41	68.33

The table 09 that 45.00 per cent of the sarpanch were having Farming + Animal husbandry as their major occupation followed by 36.67 per cent had farming alone and 18.33 per cent had Farming + Animal husbandry + Service as their major occupation, respectively. In deputy sarpanch categories, 40.00 per cent of the deputy sarpanch were having farming alone as their major occupation followed by 35.00 per cent had Farming + Animal husbandry and 25.00 per cent had Farming + Animal husbandry + Service as their major occupation, respectively.

Table 9: Distribution of respondents according to their occupation (n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories of occupation	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch(n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Farming	22	36.67	24	40.00
2	Farming + Animal husbandry	27	45.00	21	35.00
3	Farming + Animal husbandry + Service	11	18.33	15	25.00

Table 10: Distribution of respondents according to their annual income (n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Low (Up to ₹ 50,000/-)	04	06.67	10	16.67
2	Medium (₹ 50,001/- to ₹ 1, 00,000/-)	34	56.66	34	56.66
3	High (Above ₹ 1, 00,000/-)	22	36.67	16	26.67

The data presented in table 10 indicated that 56.66 per cent of sarpanch and deputy sarpanch belonged to medium annual income category followed by 36.67 and 06.67

per cent sarpanch belonged to high and low annual income category, respectively. While 26.67 and 16.67 per cent deputy sarpanch belonged to high and low annual income category, respectively. It might be due to that major part of respondents belonged to double source of income like viz. Farming and animal husbandry.

Table 11: Distribution of respondents according to their Cosmopolitaness (n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Low (up to 4 places visited)	06	10.00	15	25.00
2	Medium (5-8 places visited)	31	51.66	36	60.00
3	High (> 8 places visited)	23	38.34	09	15.00

Data presented in table 11 revealed that 51.66 per cent sarpanch had medium level of cosmopolitaness while, 38.34 per cent had high and 10.00 per cent had low level of cosmopolitaness. While, 60.00 per cent deputy sarpanch had medium, 25.00 per cent had low and 15.00 per cent had high level of cosmopolitaness. Higher cosmopolitaness leads them towards higher vision and better management ability and they can handle the panchayat issues smoothly and rapidly for villager's growth.

Table 12: Distribution of respondents according to their mass media exposure (n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Lower (up to 10.52 score)	11	18.34	09	15.00
2	Moderate (between 10.53 to 14.23 score)	40	66.66	40	66.66
3	Higher (14.24 and above score)	09	15.00	11	18.34

Data presented in table 12 and it is indicated that 66.66 per cent sarpanch and deputy sarpanch had moderate mass media exposure, while 18.34 per cent sarpanch had lower and 15.00 per cent had higher level of mass media exposure whereas, in case of deputy sarpanch, 18.34 per cent and 15.00 per cent of them had higher and lower level of mass media exposure, respectively. Moderate mass media exposure enables them to impart recent innovations,

rules and regulations and government schemes for village development.

Table 13: Distribution of respondents according to their political affiliation (n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Not affiliated	35	58.34	29	48.34
2	Affiliated	25	41.66	31	51.66

It was observed that 58.34 per cent sarpanch were not affiliated to any political party, while 41.66 per cent were affiliated to a political party. Similarly, 51.66 per cent of deputy sarpanch were found to be affiliated and 48.34 per cent had no affiliation to any political party (Table 13). In general, the election of gram panchayat is not based on any political parties. Along with political affiliation, their membership with any organization was also studied and it was found that 35.00 per cent of the sarpanch were member in one organization, while 31.66 per cent, 20.00 per cent, 13.34 per cent had more than one organization membership, no membership and were holding position in organization, respectively. 38.33 per cent of deputy sarpanch had membership in one organization followed by 23.33 per cent having no membership, 20.00 per cent having more than one organization membership and 18.34 per cent holding position in organization (Table 14). Majority of the sarpanch having membership in either one or more organization is a good sign of gram panchayat development as exposure from such social participation makes them more knowledgeable and efficient towards performing their duties.

Table 14: Distribution of respondents according to their social participation (n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	No membership in any organization	12	20.00	14	23.33
2	Membership in one organization	21	35.00	23	38.33
3	Membership in more than one organization	19	31.66	12	20.00
4	Holding position in organization	08	13.34	11	18.34

Table 15: Distribution of respondents according to their self-confidence (n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Low	09	15.00	08	13.33
2	Medium	43	71.66	44	73.33
3	High	08	13.34	08	13.34

The data presented in table 15 indicates that 71.66 per cent of the sarpanch had medium level of self-confidence followed by 15.00 and 13.34 per cent having low and high level of self- confidence, respectively. While, majority of the deputy sarpanch had medium level of self-confidence (73.33 per cent) followed by 13.34 per cent having low as well as high level of self-confidence, respectively. The sarpanch and deputy sarpanch having better self-confidence may lead the gram panchayat towards development through different schemes and sources of grant for development.

From data given in table 16, it is evident that 51.66 per cent sarpanch had medium participation in extension activities followed by 28.34 per cent had high and 20.00 per cent low participation in extension activities, respectively. While, 56.66 per cent had medium, while 23.34 per cent had low and 20.00 per cent had high participation in extension activities. Medium level of participation in extension activities is good for sarpanch and deputy sarpanch to run gram panchayat smoothly and in developmental direction.

Table 16: Distribution of respondents according to their participation in extension activities (n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Low (up to 13.30 score)	12	20.00	14	23.34
2	Medium (between 13.31 to 16.99 score)	31	51.66	34	56.66
3	High (17.00 and above score)	17	28.34	12	20.00

Similar findings on socio-demographic profile of panchayat leaders were reported by Batra (2016), Kumari et al. (2016) and Patel et al. (2017).

Role perception of Panchayat leaders

While analyzing role perception, it was noticed that 58.33 per cent of sarpanch had moderate role perception followed by 21.67 per cent having lower and 20.00 per cent having higher role perception. It was also revealed that 65.00 per cent of the deputy sarpanch had moderate role perception while 18.34 per cent had lower and 16.66 per cent had higher role perception (Table 17). Majority of the sarpanch and deputy sarpanch having moderate role perception indicates that they have understood their right and responsibilities as an office bearer. They can accomplish the developmental activities of the gram panchayat with proper approach and can gratify the need of the villagers agreeably. The findings are in concurrence with findings reported by Singh et al. (2016) and Wahane (2010).

Table 17: Distribution of respondents according to their role perception (n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Lower (up to 51.15 score)	13	21.67	11	18.34
2	Moderate (between 51.16 to 67.00 score)	35	58.33	39	65.00
3	Higher (67.01 and above score)	12	20.00	10	16.66

Mean score(sarpanch)= 59.08 SD (sarpanch)=7.93
 Mean score (deputy sarpanch) = 56.95
 SD(deputy sarpanch) =7.20

Role performance of Panchayat leaders

Data presented in table 18 revealed equal role performance of both sarpanch and deputy sarpanch (51.66 per cent). Sarpanch had moderate role performance followed by 25.00 per cent having lower and 23.34 per cent having higher role performance. It is also revealed that 51.66 per cent deputy sarpanch had moderate role performance while 26.67 per cent had lower and 21.67 per cent had higher. Moderate role performance shows that they took a keen interest in the developmental activities of gram panchayat to convince and widen their area. These findings are in accordance with the findings of Deshpande et al. (2013), Patel et al. (2017) and Kumar et al. (2023)

Table 18: Distribution of respondents according to their role performance (n=120)

Sr. No.	Categories	Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch (n=60)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Lower (up to 84.36 score)	15	25.00	16	26.67
2	Moderate (between 84.37 to 99.15 score)	31	51.66	31	51.66
3	Higher (99.16 and above score)	14	23.34	13	21.67

Mean score(sarpanch)= 91.76
 SD (sarpanch)=7.40
 Mean score (deputy sarpanch) = 87.56
 SD (deputy sarpanch) =8.33

Correlation between role perception and role performance with their profile

Table 19 presents the correlation between the profile of sarpanch and deputy sarpanch with their role perception and role performance. Age (0.2283*), family size (0.2401*), family type (0.2722*) and Political affiliation (0.2152*) were found positively and significantly associated with role perception, while, education (0.5724**), cosmopolitaness (0.4259**), mass media exposure (0.4584**), social participation (0.4499**), self-confidence (0.5267**) and participation in extension activities (0.4037**) were found positively and highly significant with role perception, gender (-0.2119), marital status (-0.2481) and occupation (-0.1359) were found negatively and non-significant, caste (0.2060), land holding (0.1468) and annual income (0.1754) were found positively and non-significantly associated with role perception of sarpanch.

Similarly, in case of deputy sarpanch age (0.2358*), family size (0.2184*), family type (0.2521*) and political affiliation (0.2774*) were found positively and significantly associated with role perception, while, education (0.7185**), cosmopolitaness (0.3872**), mass media exposure (0.5283**), social participation (0.3566**), self-confidence (0.6455**) and participation in extension activities (0.6296**) were found positively and highly significant with role perception, whereas, gender(-0.0390) and marital status (-0.0570), were found negatively and non-significantly associated. However, occupation (0.0310), caste (0.1272), land holding (0.0480), and annual income (0.1480) were found positively and non-significant association with role perception of deputy sarpanch.

Table 19: Relationship between profile and role perception and role performance sarpanch

(n=120)

Sr. No.	Variables	Coefficient of correlation (r)			
		Sarpanch (n=60)		Deputy sarpanch(n=60)	
		Role perception	Role performance	Role perception	Role performance
X ₁	Age	0.2283*	0.2795*	0.2358*	0.2200*
X ₂	Gender	-0.2119	-0.0880	-0.0390	0.0600
X ₃	Caste	0.2060	0.1239	0.1272	0.0170
X ₄	Marital status	-0.2481	-0.4551	-0.0570	-0.0200
X ₅	Education	0.5724**	0.5969**	0.7185**	0.6252**
X ₆	Landholding	0.1468	0.2115	0.0480	0.1035
X ₇	Family size	0.2401*	0.2346*	0.2184*	0.2389*
X ₈	Family type	0.2722*	0.2346*	0.2521*	0.3093**
X ₉	Occupation	-0.1359	-0.1849	0.0310	0.2141
X ₁₀	Annual income	0.1754	-0.0100	0.1480	-0.1128
X ₁₁	Cosmopolitaness	0.4259**	0.4539**	0.3872**	0.2338*
X ₁₂	Mass media exposure	0.4584**	0.4520**	0.5283**	0.4614**
X ₁₃	Political affiliation	0.2152*	0.4197**	0.2774*	0.2484*
X ₁₄	Social participation	0.4499**	0.4712**	0.3566**	0.2582*
X ₁₅	Self-confidence	0.5267**	0.5250**	0.6455**	0.4879**
X ₁₆	Participation in extension activities	0.4037**	0.5808**	0.6296**	0.6262**

* Significant at 0.05 level ** Significant at 0.01 level

Above results indicate that certain profile characteristics such as education, age, training and experience show positive and significant correlations with both role perception and role performance, meaning that higher education, more exposure to training, and longer experience are associated with better understanding of their roles as well as more effective execution of responsibilities. Conversely, some factors like family size or caste background appear to have weak or non-significant correlations, suggesting that they do not strongly influence role perception or performance. These results are in accordance with the findings of Singh et al. (2016), Patel et al. (2017) and Thakor and Patel (2021).

CONCLUSION

Based on the above results, it can be concluded that mostly sarpanch and deputy sarpanch belonged to middle age groups, had secondary education, medium landholding with farming + animal husbandry, medium income and moderate levels of cosmopolitaness, media exposure, self-confidence, role perception and role performance. Education, cosmopolitaness, media exposure, political affiliation, social participation, self-confidence and participation in extension activities were found to be highly significant factors influencing both role perception and performance. In contrast, gender, caste, marital status, landholding, occupation and income did not show significant influence. Overall, the findings highlight that capacity-building and socio-psychological attributes play a more crucial role than demographic or economic factors in

enhancing leadership effectiveness of sarpanch and deputy sarpanch. Regular capacity-building and training programs should be institutionalized for sarpanch and deputy sarpanch to enhance their role perception, confidence and performance in governance activities. Policies should also promote their exposure to mass media, extension activities and inter-district exchange programs to improve their knowledge, decision-making and effectiveness in implementing rural development initiatives.

However, this study was confined to a limited sample of 120 respondents from a single district, which may restrict the generalization of findings to other regions. Such studies should be repeated after the regular intervals in other geographical areas of Gujarat in order to further strengthen the results. Also, similar study should be conducted with other dependent and independent variables with higher number of respondents to generalize the findings.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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

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