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Untouchability still pratised in Gandhi's land

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AHMEDABAD: Rajniben, a village [panchayat](#) member from [Ahmedabad](#) district, does not have a chair to sit in the panchayat office. Unlike the other members, who all have a chair, there is a gunny sack reserved for [Rajniben](#) which she uses to sit on the floor when the panchayat meets. This is because Rajniben is a [dalit](#) and is not allowed to sit on par with panchayat members belonging to upper castes.

The untouchability factor remains high in Gujarat, the land of [Gandhi](#). A survey on discrimination in offices has revealed that nearly 65 per cent dalit sarpanchs report they have separate cups to drink tea or water in their own office. About 40 per cent are not allowed to sit on chairs.

The survey, Dalit Women's Right to Political Participation in Rural Panchayati Raj', has been conducted on 200 dalit women sarpanchs and panchayat members in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. Carried out by an NGO, [Navsarjan Trust](#), in Gujarat 100 dalit women of these, 86 were sarpanchs, while the rest were nominated for the office but could not contest the elections following political or social pressure were studied.

The survey was released at the women's tribunal, organised by Waada Na Todo Abhiyan along with other members here where nearly 200 women from marginalised sections like tribals, dalits and Muslims have participated.

The survey revealed that assuming office did not mean an end to discriminatory practices for dalit women. A good 64.5 per cent dalit women reported that they were not able to drink tea from the same cups used by other representatives and 38 per cent said that they could not eat food or snacks in the same plate or utensils used by others.

"A dalit woman may become the sarpanch, holding the highest office in the village, but is still forced to drink from a separate cup because of her caste," said [Manjula Pradeep](#), director of Navsarjan Trust.

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