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## Panchayati Raj and women's empowerment: an overview

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### Abstract

In India, women make up roughly 50% of the population. In 1992, the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts were passed, establishing the Panchayati Raj System in India. This approach offered democracy at the local level. Rural women in particular were not being given the attention they deserved during the development process. But the 73rd amendment of constitution made it so that women could participate in Panchayati Raj institutions with a third of the reservation. They left the four walls of their homes and played a significant role in the growth of nation-building, and gender discrimination also decreased. From that point forward, women had their fair share in policy making at all levels, and illiteracy among them could be decreased. They developed a greater understanding of their responsibilities and rights within the family and in society as a whole.

In the past and present, a number of women have held higher office in both state and national politics, including those of President of India, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Loksabha, Union Minister, Governor, Chief Minister, Member of Parliament, Member of the legislature, and local panchayats. In addition, numerous instances of women have been exploited as rubber stamps. Their male partners and his family are making the actual decisions. According to reports, elected women lawmakers are controlled by the political system that is dominated by men and reduced to representing their male relatives.

**Key words:-** 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment act, empowerment, panchayati raj, Women representation, women participation .

### Introduction

In India, panchayati Raj is not a recent development. Its historical use dates back more than a thousand years. Panchayati Raj has its origins in traditional Indian institutions from a time when Panchayats were in charge of small-scale democracies in the countryside. Women were not barred from entering politics during this time period, but they weren't interested in it due to a male-dominated environment. These ancient republics were nearly destroyed by the British occupation due to their ruthless tax collecting methods and the adoption of the Zamindari land tenure system, as well as the participation of women in politics. The British persisted in enforcing purdah and prohibiting women from pursuing higher education because they believed the "Vote of Women" would occur prematurely in Indian society (Bhagat, 2004).

India, which gained independence, has become the biggest democracy in the world, with about half of the population being women. Women have historically been the most disadvantaged members of society, therefore empowering them has a significant impact on improving their social, economic, and political position. It entails creating a society where women can behave freely without being constrained by repression, mistreatment, worry, discrimination, or the general sense of mistreatment

that comes with being a woman in a construction that has historically been dominated by men. One of the tried-and-true methods for empowering women can be seen in the political contributions of women. The panchayat, which is the level of government closest to the people, can play a significant part in their empowerment by ensuring their active engagement (Sudipta Biswas, 2015). Women with disabilities have primarily been neglected. They have never participated in the decision-making process in the home or in the entire society due to a number of societal restrictions and laws. In addition, according to our constitution and legal norms, women now have the same standing as males, but they still have a long way to go. It has been demonstrated that "a country succeeds if its women succeed" Hence women's empowerment is crucial towards the development of the entire society. 'Empowerment' means 'to authorize'. In this perspective of the people, they have to be authorized to have control over their own lives. Empowerment is an only effective answer to oppression, mistreatment, injustice and other descents of society. In short, Women empowerment means to give women the opportunity to fulfill their innovative proficiencies, requirements and the process of decision making by alone.

### **NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONCERNS ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT-**

Several International Institutions, Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations took the initiative to motivate the socio-economic and political status of the women in the entire society. Equality in all the provinces is inseparable from the essential participation. In 1946 the UNO recognized a commission on the status of the women. The major aim and focuses of the commission were to promote the implementation of the principle that 'men and women shall have equal rights'. Subsequently 1948 the United Nations delivered its Universal Declaration of Human Rights which has been protecting "the equal rights of the men and women," (Trivedi, 2010, pp. 41-43). The problem of empowerment of the women came to the forefront with the convention on the 'Political Rights of women' (1952) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights in 1966, envisioned at providing equal opportunity to women in their public life. The First World Conference was held in 1975 in Mexico City and United Nations declared 1975 as the International Women's Year and 1980 as the year for 'Development of Women'. In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was implemented by the UN General Assembly. In 1985 the world conference on Women in Nairobi, advocated the "onward looking strategies for the expansion of women's", (Singh, 2003, p.257). Subsequently formation of various developmental programmes and plan of action for women empowerment at the national and international level.

### **Gender Equality and Empowerment -**

The concept of gender equality is protected in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles of State Policy. The Indian Constitution not only ensuring equality to women but also empowers the State to remedial measures of positive perception in favor of women. Subsequently the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78), India has been making a marked shift in its method to women's concerns from welfare to development while keeping the enablement of women as the central issue in responsible their position in the society (Sunita Singh, 2013, p.3). The basic concept of empowerment happened with the civil rights movement in the USA, in 1960. The International Conference on Population and Development was held in Cairo, in 1994 and afterward, in 1995 the 'Fourth World Conference on Women had been organized in Beijing. Both conferences

renowned the significance of women empowerment and reiterated that procreative health is an essential part of women's empowerment. The Government of India also executed this agenda. As an outcome, the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCW) made efforts to make women resistant, cognizant, and attentive about their rights, health and social development (Hilary Rodham Clinton, 1995, p.4),.

### **STATUS OF WOMEN HELD HIGHER POSITIONS IN INDIA-**

Our constitutional provisions of equality ensured women political rights by legitimizing their role for participation in public life, within the formal and legal framework. After various decades of independence, there was little development in women's active participation in politics. Women have continued outside the province of power and political authority. Only a few women have been competent to extend the higher decision making position in the legislature. Smt. Indira Gandhi became the first woman Prime Minister in 1966, after the four epochs Pratibha Devi Singh Patil was a first woman President of India in 2007. In 2009, Meera Kumar became the first woman Lok Sabha Speaker of India. In this respect, India is at least ahead of the U.S.A, where no woman President has been elected as yet in the history of modern USA. After independence, many women have held berth in the council of ministers and also held an important position of the Governor and Chief Ministers of the Indian states. The prominent women Chief Ministers who led their state governments successfully include Sucheta Kriplani and Mayawati (Uttar Pradesh), Shashikala Kakodhar (Goa), Satyavati (Orissa), Janki Ramachandran and J. Jayalalitha (Tamilnadu), Rajinder Kaur Bhattal (Punjab), Uma Bharti (Madhya Pradesh), Sushma Swaraj and Sheila Dixit (Delhi), Mamta Banerjee (West Bengal), Vasundhara Raje Sindhia (Rajasthan). In this line Anakin Patel became the first woman Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2014 and in 2016, Mehbooba Mufti was a first woman Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. The women Governors include Sarojini Naidu (Uttar Pradesh), Vijay Laxmi Pandit (Maharashtra), Padmaja Naidu (West Bengal), Jyoti Vanketchaylam and Ram Dulari Sinha (Kerala), Sharadha Mukherjee and Kumud Ben Joshi (Andhra Pradesh), Chandrawati, Rajendra Kumari Vajpai and Rajni Rai (Pondichery), Sarla Grewal (Madhya Pradesh), Justice M. Fatima Bibi (Tamil Nadu), Sheila Kaul, Prabha Rao and Urmila Singh (Himachal Pradesh), (Shukla, 2007, pp.112-113).

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN PRIS -**

The active participation of the women in Panchayat Raj Institutions was carried on attention in the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee's report in 1957, which was recommended that motivation of the two women members in Panchayats carry out the specific programmes for women and children. The Committee on Status of the women in India was constituted in 1971 to look into all features of the women's status in India, especially their political participation. The committee in its report submitted in 1974 recommended the establishment of statutory women's Panchayats at the village level with self-rule and resources of their own for the management as well as administration of the welfare and development programmes for the women and children. Provisions were made for the direct election of women representatives by the women of the villages and rights were given to them to send their representatives to the Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad, (Sabanna Rao, 2011, p.38). In 1977, again a committee under Ashok Mehta placed stress on the need for the identifying and reinforcement women's role in the decision-making process of the Panchayats. The National Perspective Plan (NPP) for women 1988-2000 A.D. clearly recommended 30 percent reservation of seats in the favor

of the women at the village Panchayats to the ZilaPanchayat level and at the municipal bodies, (Ahmed, Nilofer&Parveen, 2008, 662). A historic movement arrived for the women of India on 24th April 1993 when the 73rd Amendment Act related to Panchayat Raj Institutions came into force. This Act constitutionally empowered the women by giving them 33% representation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions as well as reserving one-third of the chairperson's post in the three-tier system. Apart from that, the government adopted the National Policy for the empowerment of the women on 20th March 2001. The main objective of this policy is to bring about the encroachment, enlargement, and empowerment of women and to safeguard their effective participation in all spheres of public life and activities, (Raju in Rao, 2011, p. 143).

### **Role of Women activities in Panchayat Raj Institutions-**

The active participation of collective women members in numerous activities such as attending Gram Sabha meeting, Women are actively participating in rural development programmes as per their capability right from laborers to policymakers. Participation of women as elected as well as non-elected members are rising due to implementation in the reservation for women at all level. It acts as a pull factor for women to participate in the meeting. They give their suggestions for various works and problems faced by them (GadadharBehera (2017, pp.1-5). The rural women actively participating in the activities related to the welfare and upliftment of women in their area as being the members of PRIs. The main activities of women through PRIs mostly take part of as abolition of dowry and female illiteracy, reducing the domestic violence and violence against women and Dalits to stop female foeticide, eradicating discrimination against female child, enrolment of girl child in schools and other educational institutions, to promotion of women in seeking employment in government developmental schemes, to assistance women in obtaining economic support for running small scale business, to consolidate self-help groups and co-operatives among the women, to make awareness among the women about the voting and other political rights as well as assisting better mother and child health care facilities and implementing family planning programmes and etc. (Srivastava, A.K, 2009, p.364)

### **Problems faced by women representatives in Panchayat Raj Institutions -**

- Non-co-operation of male members they are predominantly based on the basis of gender discrimination during the implementation of programmes at panchayat level.
- Unnecessary political intervention by the male domination from the ruling political parties in the functioning of panchayats.
- Intervention of male members in the family of women representatives.
- Husband's interventions of an elected woman in her functioning in her panchayat welfare activities and also mostly actual decisions are being taken by their male partners and his family members.
- Lack of political, constitutional and legal awareness, among the women in rural areas. → Negative public opinion regarding women's leadership and capacity in political participation in rural areas.
- Lack of literacy and low level of education among the women particularly in rural areas is a cautious coalition.
- Insufficient training courses and awareness programs especially for women representatives at the panchayat level.
- Domination and atrocities of elected male members of the panchayat level.

- Violence against women has seen an increase by politically motivated by a male-dominated society and etc.

**CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION** - The Indian Constitution, there are certain requirements for equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their social and economic status in the country. The government of India passed the 73rd constitutional amendment, which was followed by the 74th amendment mandating reservation of 1/3rd of the seats of women in all village block and district level elected bodies. Apart from that such requirements exist only in pen and paper for millions of economically and socially deprived people in India particularly SC's, ST's and Women. Women are in much nastiest position than men not only in terms of sex ratio, literacy rate, workforce involvement, life expectation, but also in terms of their evaluation to a power structure which controls and guides the development programs of a society. Since access to political opportunities and participation in the political decision-making process are important mechanisms of competence and self-sufficiency, discrimination in this admiration leads. The government needs to take an essential action in such an intervention of political parties and elections should be conducted free and fair. Women should be involved in decision-making process in order to bring their demands on the national agenda. In order to safeguard empowerment of women in the political ground, the issue of reservation of 1/3rd of the seats for women in grass root levels of the organizations was taken up by different women's organizations and social thinkers. In rural areas political and legal awareness and rights among the women's are negligible. It is the duty of the state government and local administration along with NGO's, legal and political activists, academicians and stakeholders to educate the women about the political and legal issues and create the awareness about effective participation, special training and refresher courses for women representatives should be conducted from time-to-time. It gives them confidence and creates political awareness and power.

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