



POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN PANCHAYATHRAJ INSTITUTIONS: A STUDY

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Abstract

Panchayats have been the backbone of grass-root democracy in the Indian villages since its beginning. 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 introduced the three-tier Panchayati Raj system to ensure people's participation in rural reconstruction in general and that of women in particular. With the establishment of PRIs in our country a woman gets an opportunity to prove her worth as a good administrator, decision-maker or a good leader. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 is a milestone in this regard. It provides women a chance to come forward. This experiment is proving to be a big success particularly by providing opportunity to women to come out of their houses and participate in administrative and political field. 73rd constitutional amendment act 1992 provided reservations to women candidates to participate and empower in politics. The present article examines the women empowerment through panchayathraj after constitutional status.

Key words: *Panchayaths, 73rd amendment act, women, political filed empowerment.*

Introduction

Panchayats have been the backbone of grass-root democracy in the Indian villages since its beginning. 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 introduced the three-tier Panchayati Raj system to ensure people's participation in rural reconstruction in general and that of women in particular. Women empowerment is a topic that comes up frequently in discussions about human rights and development. It is a vital precondition for every society's overall growth. Even though women make up over half of the population, they are still oppressed and have uneven socioeconomic and political positions. For decades, women's empowerment has been a hot topic in India and internationally. Women in India who are submissive to males must be empowered to overcome social, political, and economic inequality. Since India's independence in 1947, there have been numerous initiatives to enhance women's status. The Constitution (Seventy-Third Amendment) Act, 1992 is a significant step forward in women's political empowerment through Panchayati Raj institutions. As a result, a substantial number of women who were formerly homemakers have gained access to decision-making bodies in rural regions.

Provisions for women in the 73rd amendment act:

- The Act provides for the reservation of not less than one-third of the total number of seats for women (including the number of seats reserved for the SCs and STs).
- Further not less than one-third of the total number of offices of chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women. This would be rotated among different Panchayats at each level.

Women empowerment through 73rd Amendment Act: Women's experience of being involved with the PRI has transformed many of them. They have gained a sense of empowerment by asserting control over resources, officials & most of all, by challenging men. They have become articulate & conscious of their power.



1. Political empowerment: The Act provides for the reservation of not less than one-third of the total number of seats for women. It is an attempt to ensure greater participation of women in election process directly and indirectly. It would be the nursery of creating women politicians for national politics. Even the participation of common women citizens in various activities such as attending Gram Sabha meeting, etc. has reportedly increased (68-78 percent).
2. Economic empowerment: Women are actively participating in rural development as per their capacity right from labourers to policy-makers. This empowers them economically and helps them in being independent.
3. Decision-making: The participation of women as elected as well as non-elected members are rising due to reservation for women. It acts as pull factor for women to participate in meeting. They give their suggestions for various works and problems faced by them. This empowers them and enable them to take decisions in different spheres of life.
4. Raise in voice: Despite their low- literacy level, they have been able to tackle the political & bureaucratic system successfully. They have used their elected authority to address, critical issues such as education, drinking water facilities, family planning facilities, hygiene & health, quality of healthcare & village development.
5. Empowerment of other women: Women are acting as an agent of change in the society and raising voice against injustice and atrocities. Women role has led to raise of voice by women against domestic violence and other atrocities. A woman is being empowered to active participation and awareness of women about their rights and power.
6. Reduction in violence against women: Domestic violence has substantially declined due to women pradhan or sarpanch. These women representatives take pro-actively take up such violence. The victims also feel free to share their grievances to women representatives.

Issues in women representation in PRIs

1. Illiteracy and low education levels of the majority of the women elected to the PR's.
2. Women are overburdened with family responsibilities.
3. Introversion due to the lack of communication skills.
4. Poor socio-economic background with which the women have come into the system and poor capacity building.
5. Male family members and also leaders from the caste group/community come in the way of the affairs of the Panchayats.
6. Indifferent attitude and behaviour of officials working in the system.
7. Misguidance by the local bureaucracy.
8. Mounting pressure from the political party which has vested interests in the gender reservation for positions in the PRI system.
9. Undue interference by the husband (post sarpanch) of women representatives, treating them as mere dummies.
10. Widespread use of corrupt practices among the male members and local bureaucrats.

With the establishment of PRIs in our country a woman gets an opportunity to prove her worth as a good administrator, decision-maker or a good leader. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 is a milestone in this regard. It provides women a chance to come forward. Government should encourage research and development in effective implementation of provisions of 73rd amendment

Role of Women in Panchayats

- Participation in election: The Act provides for the reservation of not less than one-third of the total number of seats for women. It is an attempt to ensure greater participation of women in



election process directly and indirectly. It would be the nursery of creating women politicians for national politics. Even the participation of common women citizens in various activities such as attending Gram Sabha meeting, etc. has reportedly increased (68-78 percent).

- Participation in rural development: Women are actively participating in rural development as per their capacity right from labourers to policy- makers.
- Participation in decision-making: The participation of women as elected as well as non-elected members are rising due to reservation for women. It acts as pull factor for women to participate in meeting. They give their suggestions for various works and problems faced by them.
- Agent of social revolution: Women are acting as an agent of change in the society and raising voice against injustice and atrocities.
- Reducing corruption and violence: Due to women representatives' nexus of officers and male elected representatives are breaking, which has a direct impact on reducing corruption. The role of local muscle power has substantially reduced due to active participation and awareness of women about their rights and power.
- Reduction in violence against women: Domestic violence has substantially declined due to women pradhan or surpanch. These women representatives take pro-actively take up such violence. The victims also feel free to share their grievances to women representatives.
- Reduction in violence against Dalits: The dominance of upper caste patriarchy is substantially declined; hence the shackles of caste is subsiding.
- Practising participatory democracy: Growing participation of marginalised section in general and women in particular, is transforming our democratic setup from representative democracy to participatory democracy.

Difficulties faced by women representatives in PRS

- Political intervention in the functioning of Panchayats.
- Women act as proxies for men.
- Husband's intervention of elected woman in her functioning.
- Lack of political awareness among the women in rural areas.
- Negative public opinion regarding women's leadership capacity.
- Illiteracy or low standard of education among the women in rural areas is a stumbling block.
- Lack of training courses especially for women representatives.
- Dominance of elected male members of the Panchayat.
- Politically motivated violence against women have seen an increase.

Impact on women with restructured Panchayati Raj Institutions

The said scheme of RGSA will give its major attention to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). It will help lakhs of PRIs to strengthen governance capacities to achieve the SDGs via inclusive local government and the most efficient use of available resources. PRIs achieving SDG goals will ultimately help to achieve gender equality, education, hygiene, sanitation, nutrition, etc. The scheme will help represent Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women as panchayats which will help women become politically powerful. Also, this scheme will help in strengthening panchayats, and gram sabhas would be strengthened to operate as effective institutions that promote the social inclusion of people, particularly disadvantaged groups, under the plan. It will provide an institutional structure with appropriate human resources and infrastructure for PRI capacity building at the national, state, and district levels. All these developments in PRIs will ultimately make women stronger. As the main focus of this scheme is on women and development then, the women's words will be considered.



Suggestions for effective participation of women in Panchayati Raj System

- Political parties intervene in the election and functioning of Panchayats, creates hostile environment for the women contestants and women representatives. The government should take a strict action in such an intervention of political parties and elections should be conducted free and fair.
- In rural areas political awareness among the women is negligible. It is the duty of the state government and local administration to educate the women about the political issues and create awareness among them.
- 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.
- Government should make special provisions for the women representatives and give them more powers as compared to male counterparts and educate them about their powers. It helps them to work efficiently and effectively.
- There should be a provision to give honour and financial rewards to the women members for their exemplary works.

Conclusion

Women's political empowerment can begin with PRIs, since their confidence and grasp of the polity will enable them to vote in elections to state legislatures and Parliament, opening the route from "Panchayat to Parliament". They can even get the confidence to take a stand for themselves, but it is only the start of a journey toward empowerment. Women's empowerment requires more than local reservations and women's involvement in Panchayati Raj institutions because the mindset that women are meant for households has still not changed, women are still not educated. Still, women are oppressed and are denied their rights and they face many more hurdles. But the PRIs are great initiatives to make women strong either politically, economically, or socially. With the establishment of PRIs in our country a woman gets an opportunity to prove her worth as a good administrator, decision-maker or a good leader. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 is a milestone in this regard. It provides women a chance to come forward. This experiment is proving to be a big success particularly by providing opportunity to women to come out of their houses and participate in administrative and political field. It has to be considered that the inclusion of well qualified women in village Panchayati at the initial state of the interlocation of Panchayati Raj Institution in rural areas would be an important instrumental measure in planning for improving social status and empowering women. Women constitute half of the population of our country. It is our duty to encourage the women in such a largest democracy of the world. To give a proper status to the women, Government, NGOs, and Universities have to play a vital role in this field. This group of women, if provided representation at village Panchayati level can strongly rise and handle the issues related to the betterment of women, can play dominant role in decision making process and make suitable recommendation for improving the status of women in the meeting. It creates opportunities for women to exercise more control over design and provisions of services and the management of resources it may benefit. Good number of women competing with the men in local politics, forwarding gender related agendas is looked as a way towards the gender equity.

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