

# Role of Women in Panchayati Raj

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## Abstract

India emphasized women's political participation after United Nations declaration of International Women day 1975 and took concrete measures to draw women into leadership positions and thereby into politics by providing them reservation at grass root level i.e. PRI. It aimed at mobilizing the effective participation of rural public in decision making and in the implementation of rural development scheme with this as the objective efforts has been made to democratise the local institutions in India and to endow them with powers and authority as units of self-government. Through 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act certain number of seats are reserved for scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and women to provide them opportunity to contest election membership as we as chairpersonship at every level of PRIs. That reservation at the grassroots level has opened new horizon for SC women participation in country's political Swarnkar, R.C. (1988) pointed out that more participation of scheduled caste women in PRIs will be clear indication of a change in the traditional now which restricted free movements of female in the society. It has created a silent revolution in the country to create proper social, economic and political conditions to enable SC women to participate effectively in the local government institutions. Caste is very important factor in mobilizing public support for contesting election at every level right from panchayat to parliament.

This step seems to be in the right direction. From the provisions of the new Act, one would underline the vigour and vitality of new system. It is a process of total transformation of the people in the rural area.

**Keywords:** Women, Panchyats, Participation, Awareness, Governance.

## Introduction

Women have enjoyed privileges and high status in society. They have played an important part in social, cultural, religious, economic and political activities since the time immemorial. The status of women is supposed to be the true indicator of development of the society. It is rightly said that a country is as advance as its women.

Women have traditionally played a significant role in different walks of life since ancient times. In the early medieval age, during the time of Harsha, his sister Rajyashri, after the death of her husband occupied the seat of owner by the side of her brothers and also participated in deliberations. The Indian methodology and ancient history bring out the fact that women are accorded due respect in our society. The names of female often preceded those of men, e.g. Sita Ram, Radha Krishan, Gauri Shankar & Laksami Narayan. Also some female deities were given the place of eminence and were worshipped on the basis of their own merit, e.g. Saraswati, Durga, Lakshmi, and Kali etc.

Bhasan, A.L. (1977) explained that in the early Vedic period Aryans gave full freedom for physical, intellectual and moral development of women and they sought active cooperation of the women in almost all spheres of life.

According to Altekar, A.S. (1956), "Religious ceremonies were considered to be incomplete without women's participation. There was no discrimination between a son and daughter in a matter of education. The girls had lot of freedom in the matters relating to marriage. Early marriages were unheard of as no reference to such a marriage is found in the whole of Rigveda Sahmita." Boys and girls were at liberty to choose their partners. The numbers of widow were very small in the absence of early marriage and a widow could remarry if she chooses her life partner. Thus Position of women during early Vedic period was as a whole satisfactory in comparison to that of later period. The community as a whole was showing proper concern and respect for women by allowing them considerable freedom in different forms of the social, economic and political life. During later Vedic period, the age of Brahmanison and Upanishads, the tradition of

early Vedic period continued. Both men and women were granted admittance to philosophical gathering. Gargi and Matrey were famous philosopher's seers of truth of this period. The conditions of women once again improved due to rise of Buddhism. Buddhism believed in social and religious equality. According to Sharma, T. (1987), "The Buddhist convents opened out to women, opportunities for education, sect culture, varied spheres of social service in which they made themselves equal to men by supplementing their work in the spread of their faith."

Laxmi Mishra (1992) pointed out that the Hindu society became more rigid with the advent of Islam during Turk-Afghan and Mughals period. In this period purdah system widely prevailed, the early marriage began to perform at high level. Dowry also came into vogue. Certain families resorted to infanticide. Some families encouraged Sati system. The condition of women becomes miserable. Mean while, the Bhakti Movement of the period gave some relief to the women of India. It proclaimed the principle of love and equality for all. Rajya Sultan, Chandbib, Gulbadan Begum, Rupmati, Padmavati, Rudrama Devi were eminent political and cultured females at that time. However, Raja Ram Mohan Rai, Ishwar Chand Vidhya sagar, Rabindernath Tagore, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Mahatma Gandhi are the great reformers who fought for better position to women. In the freedom struggle movement, the women have participated very actively similarly during post independence, women took up the leading the fields of health, social work, education, politics, legislature, administration, panchayat, municipal councils etc.

Constitutional 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act provides good opportunities for women to have active participation in grass-root politics. The act also open new horizon forever all development of women through their decision - making and enlightenment of their rights and duties.

The Constitutional rights are to serve instruments for achieving equality of status and opportunity in all spheres. Our prominent leaders of freedom struggle such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Jaya Prakash Narayan had also talked to have democracy at the grass root level and also wanted to involve the rural masses in the task of national reconstitution. Gandhi, for example, advocated that "True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the Centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village."

According to Lenin, "But you cannot draw the asses into politics without drawing the women into politics as well. For, the female half of the human race is doubly oppressed under capitalism (and) in 'household bondage". According to Johan, "Women generally participate in large number in voting but not in other political activities such as attendance at public rallies and membership of social and political organizations. Their participation is very low. Their representations in national and local legislative bodies and their presence at decision-making is marginal. According to Illa Jensen (1983) "Women representation is dependent upon the type of electoral

system, the plurality system is found to constitute an efficient barrier against the skill over, whereas proportional representatives system is more responsive."

#### **Importance**

Importance of study to increase the level of political awareness among women in order to achieve qualitative and quantitative female representation in the rural local bodies

As women constitute half of the population of a country, any development activities cannot be performed without active participation of them. It is most commonly heard that women are the mother of society 'depends upon the development of women. If a mother is empowered, a family, and eventually an entire society are also empowered women empowerment refers to increasing the spritual, political, social, or economic strength of women so we need the importance the study of the role of women in panchayati raj.

#### **Review of the Literature**

The practice of reviewing the literature is an established aspect of the research work. In order to attain over all development at grassroot level, the role of local-self government has to be more transparent. Women Panchayat leaders must fulfill the expectation of the people and the government.

Johan, Rounaq, (1987) in an article entitled 'women in South-Asian Politics' focused that women generally participate in large number in voting but in other political activities such as attendance of public rallies or membership of political and social organization their participation is very low. Their representation in national and local legislative bodies and their presence of decision-making level is marginal.

Deshpande, Nirmala (1989) in her article entitled 'Participation of Women in Political Syatem' discussed on participation of women in political system and pointed out marginalization of women due to socio-economic constraints had stood in the way of effective participation of women in political process not withstanding several legal measures to protect their interest in several states participation of women in all spheres of life. The author has expressed the optimism that in the wake of their effective participation in PRIs, women will come forward to join and compete with their male counterparts in states and national politics.

P. Manikymba (1989) in a research entitled "Women & Panchayati Raj" conducted in Andhra Pradesh on four gram Panchayat, one Zila Praja Parishad, two Panchayat Samiti women members who were elected in 1987 in the Eastern Godawari District of Andhra Pradesh concluded that the position in the matter of women members attending the meeting of the panchayati Raj bodies in Haryana is equally unsatisfactory. As study pointed out, the woman members of Gram panchayats rarely attend meetings. In the case of samiti and Zila Parishad meetings, women members would be present but in purdah or under veil. He also concluded from his study that caste and economic status Plays important role in the participation of women. The participation of

poor class women members is very insignificant. The middle class and rich members showed greater degree of participation.

Narare, R. Savita, (1990) in her study entitled 'The Role of Education in Socialisation of Scheduled Caste women' conducted on 50 primary school teachers' views on SC women leaders at village level in Pune described that in the Hindu society till recently the scheduled castes were treated as untouchables and accorded a very limited role and place. In order to attain the change, new norms are being evolved and new processes being initiated for enabling individuals for reaching these norms.

Rao, Subha (1993) in her study entitled 'Role of women in PRI' explained that a kind of action oriented programme should be taken up to increase the level of political awareness among women in order to achieve qualitative and quantitative female representation in the rural local bodies.

Mohanty, Bidyut (1995) in his research paper "Women & Panchayati Raj" based on primary survey conducted in some parts of Orissa in 1994 expressed that in the context of the reservation of the seats now granted, the women at both high and low castes would sit together in the same place. Traditionally, they have been barred from sharing a common place. If the male and other female members of the family do not adapt themselves to the new situation, it will face tensions and this age-old institutions itself will undergo drastic change.

Singh, Surat, (1997) in his study entitled 'Women Panchayati Raj Representative – a Study of a District in Haryana' based on sample of 65 elected women representative in PRIs explained that during discussions with women representatives, it was noticed that a feeling of satisfaction prevails rural society.

Thus, the provision of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> reservation for women including reservation to SCs has enabled the weaker sections, illiterate, landless, assetless and poor women to participate and involve in decentralized governance and development.

Tekchandani, Bharti & other (1998) in their study entitled "They call me Member Saab, Women in Haryana Panchayati Raj" took place in District Karnal, interviewing the sample of 137 women representatives in PRIs. They concluded that women's involvement in PRI is minimal; they are hardly ever consulted for any decisions to be taken by their respective PRI. At the Gram Panchayat level, especially where factionalism divides the panchayati into 2 or three group, women who join the group other than that of the Sarpanch get completely side-tracked and are never able to get anything done for their wards on the whole, the women not getting their due importance as a result of which they tend to lose interest in their new role.

#### **Objective of the Study**

The main objective of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act is to remove the isolation of women in the village political system, political empowerment of women and moreover to develop the grassroot leadership among women.

#### **Achievement**

After independence, however, considerable changes have taken place in the society. In the first place untouchability is banned by law and equality between all groups has been accepted as the basis of the new social order. Caste taboos & discrimination do operate to a considerable extent in the rural area. Secondly the small independent village based social order is now being transferred into a larger, integrated and interdependent society having a modern industrial and economic base. In order to attain the change, new norms are being evolved and new processes being initiated for enabling individuals for reaching these norms.

#### **Challenges**

In the case of samiti and zilaparishad meetings, women members would be present but in purdah or under veil. He also concluded from his study that caste and economic status plays important role in the participation of women. The participation of poor class women members is very insignificant. The middle class and rich members showed greater degree of participation. With in that society women were most neglected section. They could be regarded as the oppressed group in the society. Low status of women is reflected in the low sex ratio, illiteracy, education, participation in employment, high mortality rate for females, increasing dowry deaths.

#### **Conclusion**

On the basis of reviewed literature of the various related studies, it can be concluded that every study has established that participation of scheduled caste women representatives, it increased after the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment act since the literacy percentage is less in sc/st women therefore, greater efforts would need to be made for motivating those women to join leadership and perform effective role. special strategies would need to be worked out for these areas to make them aware of their rights and entitlement illiterate women could be very well educated in several matters and their illiteracy would not be a barrier to their knowledge and information.

#### **Suggestions**

1. In rural areas political awareness among the women is negligible. It is the duty of the state government and local bodies to educate women about the political issues and create awareness among them.
2. The feudal thinking in our society is a big problem of our society as well as in the path of women representatives of the PRIs.
3. Special training and refresher courses for women representatives should be conducted from time to time. It gives them confidence and create political awareness and power.
4. There should be Reservation for women in a panchayat.
5. There should be given rewards / incentives to the honorable women.

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