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## POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH PANCHAYAT RAJ IN INDIA

**Hanumanthappa M.B.**, Asst. Prof., Deptt. of Political Science, A.D.V.S. First Grade College, Sasvehalli, Honnali, Davanagere (Distt.), Karnataka, India

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**Abstract:** *The study attempt to identify the women empowerment through panchayat raj program. This paper is based on secondary data and some observation in channagiri taluk. The educated Indian women have go to a long way to achieve equal rights and position because liadilions are deep rooted in Indian society where the sociological set up as been a male dominated one. She as competed with man and successfully stood up with him in every walk of life and business is no exception for this. Women leaders are assertive, persuasive and willing to take risks. 1993 amendment was a landmark day in the history of panchayati raj in India as on this day the institution of panchayati raj was accorded constitutional status through the seventy -third constitutional amendment act,1992, there by seeking to transform Mahatma Gandhi's dream of Grama swaraj into reality. "To awaken the people, it is women who must be awakened; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves, and the nation move". By NEHRU.*

**Keywords:** *Rural women, Empowerment, Development; Panchayat, Rural Politics.*

### INTRODUCTION

The decentralization or deconcentration of power in a way that the affairs of the local people are managed by means of their positive participation. It implies the extension of democracy at the grass-root level in view of the fact that the people's participation signifies the constitution of a democratic government not merely at the top but also at the foundation level of the political system. Thus, democratic decentralization or Panchayati Raj aims at making democracy real by bringing the million into the functioning of their representative government at the lowest level.

The philosophy of Panchayati Raj is deeply steeped in the tradition and culture of rural India and is by no means a new concept. 'The rationale behind the concept is to involve the public in local planning, identification of beneficiaries, decision making and proper implementation of policies and programmes of the people as described by them. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have today the basic commitment towards rural development.'<sup>2</sup> Panchayati Raj, as a system of governance, has had its ebbs and flows in the Indian polity ever since Indian



attained independence. Various committees headed by Balwant Rai Mehta, Ashok Mehta, V.P. Naik, P.B. Patil, G.V.R. Rao, L.N. Singhvi overhauled these institutions which gave necessary impetus to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. The Panchayati Raj, an enigmatic and elusive concept, has undergone topsy-turvy changes in its role, shape and function after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 which came into effect from April 24, 1993.<sup>3</sup> With the passage of the 73rd Amendment, India is at a crucial juncture in the evolution of PRIs—the Indian brand of rural local self-government. It has envisioned people's participation in the process of planning, decision-making, implementation and delivery system.

All over the world year 2001 was celebrated as the year “of empowerment of women” with gusto, making realize our existence in a different century. Empowerment refers to increasing the economic political social educational gender or spiritual strength of individuals and communities. The empowerment includes over all development in terms of education, employment asses to the resources, legislative a decision making powers, health and awareness. Political empowerment of women appears to be a much published cliched concept of the 21st century. Mahatma Gandhi had said “Women are the companion of man gifted with equal mental of capacities. She as the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of man, and she as the same rights to freedom and liberty as he has”. Gender equality and gender equity are emerging as major challenges in the global development debate. Social scientists and development activists are giving increasing emphasis to these fields in their agenda for research and development.<sup>4</sup> As Noble Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen has pointed out, “Democracy is not only the goal of development, it is the primary means of development.”<sup>5</sup> Women's participation in political processes is important for strengthening democracy and for their struggle against marginalization, trivialization and oppression. Emergence of women as a strong group would change the prevailing political practices, the nature and content of debates in the legislature and women's issues can be taken care of from the feminist perspective both in policy formulation and implementation.

Although the new Constitution through various Articles (Art. 14, 15, 23, 29, 30, 42, 45 etc.) did guarantee equal rights for women, Indian women continue to remain oppressed and struggle over everything from survival to resources. While women have made considerable



progress in some areas such as education and employment, they continue to be subjected to the influence of the existing patriarchal attitudes in Indian society. The dilemma for Indian women today is that despite the liberal provisions of the Constitution and various laws, serious inequalities remain.<sup>6</sup> In fact, right from the days of the freedom struggle the Indian women have been consistently encouraged to take part in active politics. But due to the vitiated political milieu, resulting from increasing politicization and criminalization of politics, the level of political participation of women has been adversely affected despite the fact that there has been a marked increase in the level of literacy and political awareness among women.

## **OBJECTIVES**

Against this back ground the following objectives are set for the purpose of the study:

- To study the Political and legal status of women
- To measure the political empowerment of women at work place, within the family and society.
- To assess the degree of empowerment achieved by women through panchayat system
- To identify the major problem experienced by elected women panchayat leaders.

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

India is perhaps the first country to recognize this social fact underlined by Lenin on the International Working Women's Day and to have taken concrete measures to draw women into leadership positions and thereby into politics by giving them one-third reservation in what may now be called the third tier of governance—the Panchayati Raj. The constitutional amendment providing one-third representation to women in elected bodies as well as reserving one-third of the offices of chairpersons for them will have far-reaching consequences in Indian political and social life. Now, some general observations can be made regarding the role of women in grass root level governance. It has come to the notice that the percentage of women at various levels of political activities has increased formally. The general trend is that those in politics are women belonging to the younger age-group . It is also revealed that women take up political career as an extension of their domestic role. While women have been active in mass movements, their presence is not felt in decision-making. The influence of the husbands and close relatives is quite palpable.



This tendency is due to lack of confidence. This dependency is a stumping block in their empowerment. 'Another positive impact of the grass root level experiment is the increase in the female literacy rate. Studies reveal that after two years of their election to PRIs, many women demanded literacy skills and also felt the need to educate their daughters. Issues in which women representatives generally take interest are drinking water supply, primary health, child care, public distribution system and environmental protection. One quality observed among women representatives is their patience to hear the problems of the public. They also work in adverse circumstances. It has been observed that women representatives are honest and accurate in presenting issues to the decision-making bodies and authorities. Women would bring new ideas in local governance. They believe in a sustainable development and their emphasis is on natural resources management. Women representatives working at the grass root level also believe that communal harmony is an important element of development and they strive to achieve this objective

Empowerment of women has become a subject of great concern to the development planners and policy makers all over the world. The declaration of the international women's year (1975) and the decade of women (1976-1985) by the United Nations led to the globalization of women's issues. Many nations including India became the signatories to the policies adopted at the international convention on elimination of all kinds of discrimination against women (CEDAW). As a consequence, 'national policy for empowerment of women' was declared by the government of India in 2001. Panchayats have been the backbone of the Indian villages since the beginning of the history and are a part of her tradition. April 23, 1993 was a landmark day in the history of panchayati raj in India as on this day the institution of panchayati raj was accorded constitutional status through the seventy-third constitutional amendment act, 1992, thereby seeking to transform Mahatma Gandhi's dream of Grama swaraj into reality. This Act mandates provisions for:

- Establishment of a three tier structure (village panchayats, panchayat samiti and zila parishad).
- Establishment of gram sabha at the village level.
- Regular elections to panchayat every five years.
- Proportionate seat reservation for SCs/STs.
- Reservation of not less than 1/3 seats for women.



- Constitution of state finance commissions to recommended measures to improve the finance of panchayats.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature on female empowerment largely follows to approaches. The first set of studies considers the determinants of women empowerment. The second set of studies examines different proxies for female empowerment. Female empowerment is measured by a women's ability to make house hold decisions, relative to her husband ability to make house hold decisions. Empowerment itself has been measured by a women's relative physical mobility, economic security, decision making ability, freedom from domestic violence and political awareness and participation.

Several analysis have found that access to credit programs whether through micro finance organizations or Rotating Savings Credit Association (ROSCA) has a positive effect on female empowerment (for a study in Kenya ,see Anderson and Baland, 2002;for a study in karnataka, see Sadanand, schuler and Riley, 1996 ).Studies have also found a positive link between empowerment and contraceptive use (for a study in karnataka, see sadanand and Hashemi, 1994). author says about only for women empowerment so that's why we are study about the women empowerment through panchayati raj program.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research is based on secondary and primary data. It's an exploratory and descriptive in nature. The secondary data is collected from review of past researches and other reports. The factors have been identified then classified into three categories factors responsible for hindrance, reasons for starting the business and reasons for success in women empowerment.

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**REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTION'S**

States	Gram panchayat women	%	Taluk Panchayat women	%	Zila Panchayat women	%	total	All three tiers of panchayat women	%
U.P.	120591	15	13865	23	634	24	862458	135090	16
Gujarat	21351	17	1275	33	254	33	128045	22880	18
Assam	5469	18	669	26	—	-	33769	6138	18
Tamilnadu	31548	25	2295	35	225	35	132999	34069	26
Rajasthan	33566	30	1740	32	331	32	119419	35637	30
Haryana	16704	31	858	35	82	36	57002	17644	31
M.P.	156181	33	369	35	338	33	484484	159688	33
HP.	6015	33	558	34	84	33	20177	6657	33
Maharashtra	101182	33	1174	33	587	33	308831	102943	33
Orissa	27036	33	1754	33	284	33	87191	29074	33
Tripura	1809	33	67	34	24	34	5687	1900	33
A.P	78034	34	5420	37	363	33	246266	83783	34
Goa	468	37	-	-	-	-	-	468	36
Manipur	555	36	-	-	22	36	1017	557	36
Punjab	26939	36	-	-	-	-	75473	26939	36
W.B.	17883	36	2997	35	243	34	58461	21123	36
Sikkim	326	37	-	-	38	30	965	354	37
Kerala	3883	38	563	36	104	35	12117	4550	38
Karnataka	35305	44	1343	40	335	36	84886	36983	44
Bihar	9620	45	850	40	Si	40	22573	995 i	44

Source: Narendra Prasad, *Women And Development*

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This table shows that the variation highest at the lowest sung level of gram panchayats, ranging from 15% to 45%. The best state in terms of highest participation is Bihar in followed by the Karnataka and Kerala, Sikkim and west Bengal. The table also shows below 33% women elected panchayati raj representative in the state of Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Assam.

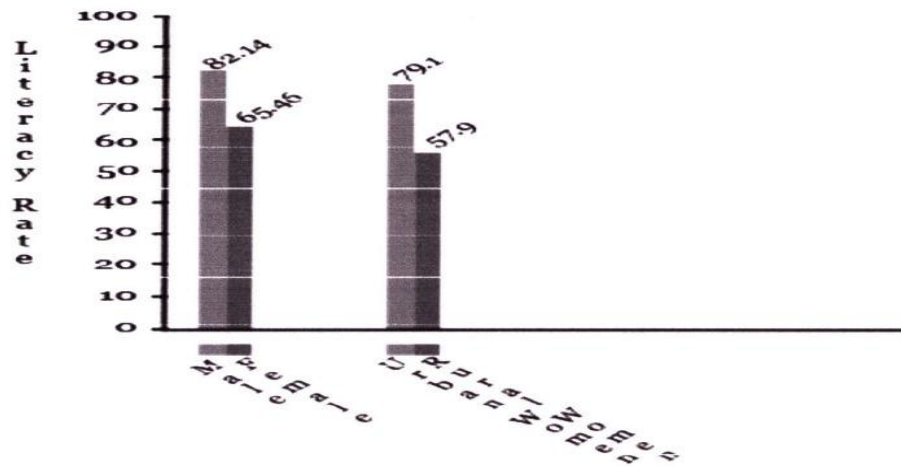


Fig. Literacy rates related to the population aged 7 years & above

### Political Empowerment of Women Representation In Parliament

Political representation was initially based on the premises that it deal's primarily with individuals, regardless of sex and equal opportunities should be granted for power and influence in society. However, as is apparent that representation of women in the lok Sabah has not crossed 10%.

### Number of women elected to lok Sabah

General election	No of women elected	Percentage
First	22	4.4
Second	27	5.4
Third	34	6.7
Fourth	31	5.9
Fifth		A ^
Sixth	19	3.4
Seventh	28	5.1
Eighth	44	8.1
Ninth	28	5.29
Tenth	39	7.02
Eleventh	40	7.02
Twelfth	44	8.07
Thirteen	49	9.02
Fourteenth	45	8.25

Source: *lalneihzovi - 'women's development in India.*

Many of the barriers women empowerment and equity life. In cultural norms many women feel these pressures, while others have become accustomed to being treated inferior to men. even if men legislators NGOs etc, are aware of the benefits women's empowerment and participation can have many are the scored of disrupting the status of us and continue



to let societal norms get in the way of development. Researches shows that the increasing access to the internet can also result in an increased exploitation of women

Releasing personal information on websites has put some women's personal safety at risk. In 2010 working to online Abuse stated that 73% of women were victimized through such areas. Recent studies also show that women face more barriers in the work place than do men, Gender- related barriers involve sexual harassment unfair hiring practices are progressing and an equal pay where women are paid less than men are for performing the same job. Such barriers make it difficult for women to advance in their work pleasure receive fair compensation for the work they provide.

### **MOBILITY CONSTRAINTS**

Rural women in Indian society has got restricted mobility. The carrier of women is limited in four walls of kitchen. The women confined themselves to three Ks -kitchen, kids and knitting. There are hardly any opportunities to across this boundary (Manima Kali and Rajeshwais 2000). The mobility problem has been solved to certain extent by the explosion of information technology and telecommunication facilities.

### **INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

A main objective of integrated rural development programme is to increase the income generating power of family who are below the poverty line to alleviate the poverty. They impart technical and entrepreneurial skills and raise the income level of poor. Some of the major employment and anti poverty programs are Regional rural development centers, Technology for banks, Fund for rural innovations, Social rural entrepreneurship.

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Despite reservation for women, effective participation in PRIs have failed due to misuse and manipulation by the local power-brokers. Ignorance of women about their rights and procedures and about their potential and responsibilities have kept them far behind men in the local bodies. It is very much doubtful that mere increase in the number of reserved seats for women in local bodies is likely to increase the participation of women. Unless structural changes are brought about, a sincere effort is made to educate women and the power structures existing in rural areas are neutralized, nothing much can be achieved. Women representatives often run into barriers (especially of family and society) and are hindered from participating effectively. They feel inhibited to speak especially when they are in large





male dominated assemblies. Those who muster up enough courage and strength to speak receive very little respect or attention. It has been observed that women are invited only to complete the quorum. Further, the officials also pay heed to the needs of upper class women in preference to the needs of peasant women. The rights of women thus get systematically nullified by the local bureaucracy

#### **Individual Weaknesses Of Women Representatives**

- Illiteracy and low education levels of the majority of the women elected members.
- Overburdened with family responsibilities Introversion due to the lack of communication skills.
- Poor socio-economic background with which the women have come into the system and poor capacity building.
- Male family members and also leaders from the caste group/community come in the way of the affairs of the Panchayats.
- Misguidance by the local bureaucracy and Apprehension of no-confidence motion by the other elected members of the system.
- Mounting pressure from the political party which has vested interests in the gender reservation for positions in the PR system. The Reservation is not enough because a woman representative lacks qualitative participation due to both internal and external factors. Woman's empowerment is not something which can be handed over to women only. This is a process which involves sincerity, earnestness and capacity and capability on the part of both men and women. It is a challenging task in village India as even today she cannot take any independent decision. She feels subordinate to her husband and even to her son.

#### **Suggestions should be followed as**

- Majority of the women in rural areas feel inferior to male members of family and Panchayats. This attitude needs to change to make women as part and parcel of the family as well as Panchayats. Women from SC and ST categories may find it difficult to mix with representatives of general categories. To cope with this problem, it is necessary to inculcate confidence among them and to bring attitudinal changes through training in the psyche of the upper classes



- Utterly Need of Independence from Early Stages in Indian villages, girls remain dependent upon the father, brother or cousin and this very feeling continues in their married life. We must give capacity building training to girls in schools to be independent.
- There is a vital need of Taking Independent Decision making power for Women representatives in PRIs must be trained in the art and science of decision-making so that they are not influenced by extraneous factors. This requires special orientation camps for the rural political elites.
- They should be given proper training in the working of the politico-administrative institutions. It is also suggested that PRIs prepare publicity material in local languages.
- The empowerment process requires social change by organizing and mobilizing the women's groups for struggle. Mahila Mandals should be formed in all the villages and get the full support of the National Commission for Women (NCW) and other women's welfare-based NGOs.

The of Motivation by their own Examples—Women MLAs and MPs should visit frequently the elected representatives of PRIs to solve the problems faced by the rural women members. They should encourage them to take decisions independently. For that, a healthy environment is a must for women's empowerment at the grass root level.

## **CONCLUSION**

The cultural dimensions and segments of Indian society are such that social progress among women can be promoted effectively through the medium of personal relationship among them. It is women who can inspire confidence and offer stimulus for social change especially among their sisters in the rural areas. Hence, effective leadership among women must come from the ranks of women themselves. Their qualitative participation can be achieved through training besides of course the literacy educational programmes. Links have to be strengthened between the village and the bureaucracy at the lower level. Special programmes on the role of women in Panchayat, on rights of women and procedures should be prepared and highlighted through the mass media so as to make women aware and improve the quality of their participation in the socio-political system.



In the end the reservation for women in panchayats will be good step but it should be supplemented with effective measures that ensure the qualitative aspect of women's participation. The India Panchayati Raj Report 2011 reveals: "Women's expectations and hopes for a greener, cleaner, responsive and representative politics have gone up. They will send out more clearly and energetically the message of women's empowerment and social development. For that reservation needs to be accompanied by considerable amount of affirmative action programme." To influence and lead effectively, women representatives must develop and use legitimate power (authority). To empower is giving women the capacity to influence the decision-making process by integrating them into our political system.

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