



WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTION

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Abstract: *It is true that true India lives in the rural village. Its villages are as old as its civilization. The evolution and origin of village panchayat is an old system. Acc. to H.D. Malviya "It (Panchayat) has been so because the village is the unchanging backbone of Indian Life." The Panchayat is a traditional word referring to the five elders in a village. Who mediated conflict & spoke on behalf of all the Residents of village. In Indian society women traditionally considered as a weaker section. The status of women has been subservient to man subjugated, exploited and oppressed. She has been discriminated form womb to tomb. They have been constantly denied of the right to expresses their views at various levels. After independence it was felt this negligence of women power had been one of the most important cause of India's backwardness. Immediately after framing the Indian constitution, Constitutional safeguard along with the provision of reservation seats in legislative bodies, public office and institution was provided them for their upliftment.*

Keywords: *Reservation, Constitutional Safeguard, Awareness*

INTRODUCTION

All over the world the gender problem has increased large during the recent years. The gender issue has become a crucial point of argument. In Indian society, women were traditionally considered as a weaker section. The status of women has been subservient to men, subjugated, exploited and oppressed. There are many social saying like - chori mare bhagwan ki and chora mare nirmbhag ka. Which reflected her position. She has been discriminated form womb to tomb. She is protected by the father in her childhood, by the husband in her adulthood and by the son in her old age. She has been given the status of secondary member of the family. Rural women in particular did not have any voice in the family as well as the society. They have been constantly denied the right to take active part in the decision making process at various levels. So this neglect of women power had been one of the most important causes of backwardness of rural India.

There is no doubt that in different countries of the world the nature of women's participation is limited. In a country where women constitute half the population, in the political system which supports popular democracy and equality of gender, where both men



and women are legally equally eligible for political participation, women participation should be equal to that to men. If this is not done, and then it signifies flaws within the political system.

Representation is not only a means of ensuring individual participation, but also a responsibility of the representatives to act on behalf of the citizens (voters) that include women, who elected them and to reflect the voter's ideas & aspirations. But disproportionate absence of women from political process would mean that the concern half of the population of a country can't be sufficiently attended to or acted upon. It is also not possible for the govt. to articulate policies and programmes for women without their active and effective participation.

It is true that true Indian lives in the rural villages. Its villages are as old as its civilization. The evolution and origin of village panchayat is an old system. According to H.D. Malviya - "It (Panchayat) has been so because the village is the unchanging backbone of Indian life".

The word 'Panchayat' is a traditional, referring to the five elders in a village who mediated conflict and spoke on behalf of all the residents of village. The word 'Panchayat' has been retained for use after the 73rd amendment to the constitution. Panchayati raj was in existence during Vedic period in ancient India and was working well as the people were carrying out their personal and official duties on 'Dharma'. The life of people was peaceful and faithful as there were limited desires of the people. In the medieval period Panchayati Raj lost its significance as feudal lords managed local affairs through dictatorship. They never bothered for the people and only acted in their own interest. During the British period, there were attempts to setup local govt. Lord Rippon is considered to be the first person who came out with a resolution of 1882 to provide framework for local govt. After this there were attempts to improve local govt. through the act of 1909, 1918, and 1935. However, there was no real intention of the Britishers to decentralize power. It was only an arrangement to suit their imperial requirements.

After independence, Govt. of India under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi was committed to set up Panchayati Raj system to provide real swaraj to the people of rural area. According to Gandhi - "A truly independent and democratic Indian, he envisioned gram swaraj or village self rule". For Gandhi true village autonomy meant that all adult women and men work together to ensure their villages self reliance in meeting basic needs. A developing



democracy like India needs wider participation of the people irrespective of caste, colour creed, sex etc in its political process. In order to provide this opportunity the system of democratic decentralization through Panchayati Raj institutions has long been introduced in our country. As the women constitute a very sizeable portion of the total population of Indian, their participation at grass root politics is so essential to make the democratic governance more successful. The question of their participation arises because of their long standing neglected social status in male dominated Indian society. Immediately after framing the Indian constitution, constitutional safeguard along with the provision of reservation of seats in legislative bodies, public office and institutions were provided to them for their upliftment.

With the dawn of the 21st century the worldview about the rural women has undergone a sea change. The rural women are now perceived as hard working productive adults. With this changed perception there is a growing realization that there can be no successful development planning without motivating equal participation of women. Panchayat (local govt.) is that of govt. where women can enter political life with ease, Panchayat are good training ground for women politicians who want to reach higher levels of elected or appointed in govt. the main purpose of women's participation in Panchayat is to change their socio-economic and political status. Keeping these aspects in mind adequate provisions had been made in shape of constitutional amendments and rules / regulation in panchayati Raj system to encourage and ensure the participation of women in the local governance system.

The 73rd constitutional amendment act 1993 has made an effort to give some special powers to women in all the three tiers of Panchayati Raj. The Act has reserved one- third of the total seats for women in panchayati raj institution. Political empowerment of rural women will have concomitant multiple impacts on the other sphere of social life. Empowerment of rural women is observed as the key solution to many social problems like high population growth rate & low status of women.

Balwant Rai Mehta Committee -: community development programme was inaugurated in 1952. It was essential for development that the initiative should have come from the below, the masses of people and in fact from the grassroots. A committee for the review of CDP was constituted in 16 Jan. 1957. Balwant Rai Mehta, a member of parliament, headed the



committee the committee's view was that without an agency at the village level real progress in rural development could not be achieved. The recommendations of the committee favored democratic decentralization through the setting up of Panchayat Raj institution. The committee suggested that the villagers should be given power to decide about their own felt needs and to do planning and implementation of the programmes accordingly. The village self sufficiency could not be attained without the active involvement of the village people. The Mehta committee suggested a three-tier structure for panchayat raj. These tiers considered of gram sabha, which was constituted on the basis of population size. This was the lowest tier of panchayati raj. The second tier was constituted at the tehsil or taluka level. The third tier was at the district level. The pattern of panchayat raj was thus developed on the co-ordination between the officials and non officials.

While Balwant Rai Mehta committee recommended three-tier panchayati raj system for the country did not consider women's participation as an issue of considerable significance. In fact, its genesis and terms of reference gave it no scope to consider the question seriously. The committee however, considered the conditions of rural women, and argued that they should be assisted to find way to increase their incomes. There was a section in the report dealing with the measures to be taken for their purpose. It had also recommended for the appointment of gram sevika and women social extension officers to facilitate effective implementation of women's welfare programmes and co-option of two women in the panchayat bodies at the block and district levels. It seemed to have considered the women's participation in panchayat primarily for implementation of women and children development programmes. They were interested in making improvement of the housekeeping function of the women. Clearly they had taken a conservative attitude to women. Women as participants in the decision making process did not pay adequate attention of the committee.

Following the recommendation of the committee women joined panchayat in the same status as co-opted member. But the result was not encouraging. They were neither able to play an important role in the decision making process in general nor in matters pertaining to women and children, women's representation become one of what may be called tokenism.

Ashok Mehta Committee-The three tier pattern of panchayati raj began to crumble down. Panchayati raj institutions were dominated by the privileged section of society. It limited the



utility of Panchayati raj for common villager. In view of this a 13 member committee headed by Shri Ashoka Mehta was set up in 1977 to suggest measures to strengthen the panchayati raj institutions. He suggests changes in the pattern of Panchayati raj. In 1977 Ashoka Mehta committee recommended a fundamental change in the Panchayati raj system. It asked for transformation of the panchayat from an implementing agency to a political institution.

The committee recommended a two tier set up – District level and mandal level covering the population of 15000 to 20000 and suggested the abolition of block as the unit of administration. The committee also suggested holding of regular election compulsory items of taxation in their jurisdiction and transfer of land revenues collection to them. It was also felt that a constitutional provision was necessary to strengthen Panchayati raj system. The main recommendation of committee was considered at the conference of chief minister in 1979, which advocated for the continuance of the existing three-tier-system. The committee also laid stress on the need for or recognizing and strengthening women's role in the decision-making process of panchayats. Committee recommended reservation of two seats for women in panchayat. The committee had also felt the need for an institutional arrangement in the form of committee with all women member of the mandal panchayat represented on it. It would ensure that decision was taken by women themselves on priorities and choice in welfare and development programme specially meant for women. The Ashok Mehta Committee had acknowledged the need for associating women with the process of decision-making, but could not give a clear direction. This had resulted in a cumbersome proposal about the participation of women in panchayat.

73rd Constitutional Amendment Act:- Prime Minister P.V. Narashimha Rao decided to draw up a fresh constitutional amendment bill for Panchayati raj institution. The 72nd amendment bill, 1991 came into existence. The bill was later on referred to a joint committee. The joint committee offer detailed deliberation presented its report to parliament in July 1992.

Taking into consideration the consensus evolved during the meeting of joint committee, the question raised by the various leaders of different political parties during the debate held in dec.1992. Necessary amendments were made by Govt. the 73rd constitutional act emerged which was passed with unanimity by Lok Sabha on 22nd Dec 1992 and by the Rajya Sabha on 23rd Dec 1992. The act came into force from 24th April 1993. The 73rd constitutional amendment act raj article 243 D and 243 T of constitution provide that not less than one



third (including the number of seats reserved for belonging to Sc/St) of the total number of seats to the free by direct election in the local bodies. (Panchayat and municipalities) would be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituents in the local bodies. This makes a beginning for effective participation of women in decision making process at grass root. It is a fact that in the election to these local bodies' one million women has been elected every five years. This portrays a very encouraging trend for women empowerment.

Panchayati Raj In Haryana:- The Haryana state came into existence on Nov. 1,1966. Haryana was the 17th state of Indian union when it was formed. The seventy third constitution Amendment Act required the states to amend or repeal existing laws that were inconsistent with its provisions within one year of commencement of the Act. Accordingly the Govt. of Haryana formulated the Haryana Panchayati raj Act 1994 which came into force on 22 April, 1994. The first election to Panchayats held in Dec-Jan 1994-1995.

The Haryana state election commission announced the schedule for the 5th Panchayat general election in Haryana August 10, 2015. But new Govt. (B.J.P.) made a decision for Panchayat election regarding compulsory education of contestant. With this, Haryana became the second state after Rajasthan to fix educational and other qualifications for the candidates contesting panchayat elections. After some debate, the Supreme Court up held a Haryana state law mandating that only those have "minimum" educational qualification will be eligible to contest Panchayat election in the state. The "minimum" education required for eligible to contest in Panchayat election is completion of matriculation in case of general candidates completion of class 8th of women candidates or a candidate belong to sc and completion of class 5th pass for sc women candidate contesting for the post of Panch or Sarpanch.

Following the Supreme court decision upholding the new Panchayati Raj Amendment Act on Sep,7 , 2015, the election to PRI Would be held as per the new Act. Mr. Rajiv Sharma (state election commissioner) told at present time there are a total of 6198 gram panchayat, 120 Panchayat Samiti and 21 Zila Parishad in the state. Following the Supreme Court decision the Haryana State Election Commission on Tuesday announced the schedule for the 5th Panchayat general election in Haryana, which will be held in three phases Jan 10, Jan 17, and Jan 20, 2016.



REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Salgoankar (2000) in her study on “women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Goa” she revealed that majority of women panchs had contested and won for the first time. Being new entrants in politics, they were less aware and less informed about the process of local politics. This became a major obstacle in their effective share in decision making. She observed majority of women representative replied that they were pushed into scene by their male family members. In them less than ten percent were the wives of sarpanchs. Their Sarpanch husbands wanted them to contest as this would strengthen their panels. The canvassing for these women was fully done by their male family members. She also found decision was made by the male family members. But it has also been seen that below 40% women contested because they were really interested in politics.

Sudha Pai (2000) conducted a study on “Pradhanis in the new Panchayat” .This study based on data from three villages in Meerut district of U.P. In the study she observed that many of Pradhanis were illiterate and only able to put their signature on official paper. They agreed to stand for election due to family pressure, not their own desire. It was common that the husbands of member used to accompany them when they come to attend the meetings. She observed the Pradhanis have never made any decision about allocation of funds to individuals or scheme. They only sign on the paper sent to their houses after decision has been made. In the study she revealed that the reservation provided by the govt had forced them to contest elections, but the provision of reservation has not led them to participate in decision making in local bodies.

Neena Kudra(2003) in her article “the experience of women in Panchayati Raj in Karnataka found that the reservation for women in Panchayati Raj institutions had been mixed results. It was also observed that gender quota is a crucial component to empower women through increased participation in the political system. It made women more visible and independent, decreased level of corruption in Panchayati Raj institutions and increased self efficiency of women representatives. It was also observed that reservation has at least succeeded in bringing the women folk in rural India into the political forum and elected women can now imagine to stand against a man in future.

Srivastav and Agrawal (2005) in their Paper “Women and Panchayati Raj Institution” revealed that there are various factors which discouraged the participation of women in



rural local governance system. These are criminalization of politics, lack of initiative, illiteracy, ignorance, lack of awareness about training and lack of adequate leadership quality. They also revealed that the 73rd constitutional amendment and the events therefore have opened up many avenues for women participation at the grassroots level, so that they actively participate in the decision making process of rural local government, but what is still needed is a holistic and comprehensive approach.

Kaul and Sahni (2009) in their paper “the participation of women in Panchayat Raj Institution” they revealed that neither the reservation for women nor their actual presence in the Panchayat have become any more sensitive to the problems related to the village women. The women who elected are not always treated with due respect. Many elected women complained that neither their suggestions were considered seriously nor they were consulted while decision was being made. Some women representative felt that their views were ignored only they are women. Many times they were pressurized by their husbands to approve the decisions made by male dominated Panchayats. The study was conducted in two district of Jammu & Kashmir.

Pitroda (2009) in his study on “Women in Indian polity and governance” observed the constitutional provisions have ensured the representation of women in local governance, but only becoming member doesn’t ensure effectiveness. It is not always have that only most capable are elected as leader. Often, women who are relatives of the existing local leader may get elected to fill up reserved seats. Such Women still continues to face considerable handicaps to their involvement in politics. The conservative attitude in rural areas, patriarchal values, religious values family responsibilities, lack of education and economics dependence make women unequipped to effectively participate in politics. In some, cases it is observed that elected women have remained at home while their husbands have attended panchayat meetings and carried out official transaction on their behalf. It is also observed that sometimes women acted as proxies for men’s views or for influential lobbies at the councils.

Chaudhary and Debnath (2011) conducted a study on “Women in Panchayati Raj Institution in west and Dhalai district of Tripura”. In the surveyed Panchayats, it has been observed that the number of less experienced member dominates. In the study they found due to reservation of seats women participation had increased. Unexpectedly it had been observed



that except two members, none of them was familiar with provision of the 73rd amendment and its relation with PRI. It was also observed that majority of the women representatives felt that after becoming member their status in the family and society improved. Through participation in Panchayat, they got opportunity to exercise their power more effectively for their own development in particular and the development of society in general. They also observed that almost all of them get full support from their family member and fellow member, who is good sign of gender equality.

Singh (2011) In his book on “Women in Panchayats: A study of role conflict” observed that majority of women representatives were brought into this new role (Sarpanch / Member) by their husband or male family members. Some were brought under pressure because of their seats were reserved .Such women representatives only work as rubber stamps for their husband and male family members. These women representatives are found to be totally dependent on their husband and all official function is performed by their family members. They just treat them as show piece and their political mascot. But it was also observed that those women representatives who have come in this role on their own desire for making a career in politics are found to be very active and independent in their role as representatives. But their number is too less. This study was conducted in Uttar Pradesh.

Sadhu and Sharma (2012) conducted a study on “Factors Influencing Participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institution in Rajasthan”. In their study they observed that the reservation for women can be an important impetus to women’s empowerment in Rajasthan, India on local level but it is not a guarantee for active participation of elected women. Women were actively prevented from participating in Panchayat activities by male family members and other members of the panchayat itself. Male panchayat members took advantage of their literacy and also tried to keep them from important meetings. It was observed that husbands handle all the work and activities of panchayat. To make women participation more effectively at every stage, capacity building supports was needed from the beginning of the election process and through the tenure of the elected representatives.

Gochhayat (2013) conducted a study on “Political participation in Gram Panchayat election in Orissa”. In his study he found that the political participation of women in the functioning as well as in the electro process of Panchayat is not satisfactory. Some of the respondents even do not know the name of political Parties and casted their votes identifying the symbol



of political parties. It was observed that majority of women representative have great apathy towards politics and they actively participated in the function of panchayat. The study also revealed the political culture, patriarchal society and low level of their education are greatly responsible for their backwardness. He also observed a great change has been taken place in the mindset of women as well as of their family members about women participation in politics. This is the result of increasing developing of mass media (like radio, newspaper, T.V. etc.); role of political parties and 73rd Amendment Act brought a sea change in the outlook of men towards women. That is why the political participation of women in Panchayat gradually developing.

Nagpal (2013) in his paper “women’s Empowerment in Haryana” role of female representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions found PRI meeting provided the opportunity to majority of female representatives to express their views on important issues related to village. The majority of female representatives either always or rarely often addressed the grievances of people who approached them. It was also seen that majority of female representative depended on their husbands or family members to help the other people.

Konesar and Kumar (2013) in their paper “Panchayat Raj Institutions as an Instrument for women Empowerment” found majority of the female members told there has been improvement in the panchayat administration due to 73rd Amendment. They felt that it improved the status of women. The women members stated that there were no difficulties due to male dominated panchayat. Some of the women chairmen have done commendable job due to reservation. Gradually the situation is changing.

Singh (2014) in his article “women participation at grassroots level” found the positive impact that is the increase of female literacy at grass root level. Study reveals that after two years of their election to PRI, many women demanded literacy skills and also felt the need to educate their daughter. The issues in which women take interest are drinking water supply, primary health child care, public distribution system and environmental protection of village. One quality observed among women representatives was their patience to hear the problem related to the public and they also work in adverse circumstances. It has been also observed that women representatives are honest and accurate in presenting issue to the decision making bodies or authorities. Women representatives working at the



grassroots level also believe that communal harmony is an important element of development and they strive to achieve this objective.

Agnihotri and Vijay Singh (2014) conducted a study on “women empowerment through reservation in Panchayati Raj Institution in Himachal Pradesh”. In the study it has been observed that most of the time the political parties intervene in the functioning of Panchayats. They even intervene in the election process directly. It creates uncomfortable situation for the women contestants and women representatives. It found that most women are elected because of the status of their husbands, fathers, or sons and such women often act as proxies for men’s view at the councils. It has been mostly found that the husband of and elected women representative always intervenes in her day to day functioning. The intervention is not only in small matters but also intervenes in her decision making matters related to panchayat which is a big drawback in the women’s active participation. It also observed the male members dominate even head women members also.

Ghosh and Sarkar (2014) in their study Participation of “women in Panchayati Raj and Decentralized Planning of West Bengal” found maximum women are elected in first time in Panchayat majority of women participate in election pressurized by her husband, family member and political party member. More than half of women members face problem in official paper work especially in financial matter. It was also observed after participation in Panchayat most of women members are think it increased their respect and popularity in village. The study also revealed that today women are engaged not only in household work but they also participated many development work in other sectors.

CONCLUSION

After independence, it was realized that India’s potential can’t be harnessed or realized unless women became equal partners in development and governance of the state affairs. Indian constitution has made adequate provisions to ensure the right of women. Following various social and economic development programme, the next logical step was to enhance the participation of women in the decision making process. The historic 73rd constitutional amendment passed and came into force with effect from 24th April 1993. Participation of women in Panchayati Raj institutions has great importance, as the objective of constitution local governance is to encourage local leadership both male and female acc to the



developmental needs of the countryside. Through the amendment women got a chance to lead in the rural political process and governance of rural areas. The 73rd constitutional amendment act 1992 laid down in Article 243(D 3) that not less than one third of total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and their seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in panchayat.

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