

Panchayati Raj System And Women Empowerment In India: An Analysis

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Abstract:

Panchayati Raj system of India was enacted in order to institutionalize the village level of democratic governance and also to provide a platform to enable the rural population to decide on the solutions to the local issues. The Panchayats became a Constitution entity after the 73rd Constitutional amendment in 1992, thus strengthening the participatory manner of governance in the rural regions. It was provided by the amendment that had increased the representation of women up to 33 percent giving them a chance in political leadership. Prior to the amendment, political and social status of women were not strong, but Panchayati Raj gave them the power of making decisions. Through Panchayati Raj women are supposed to be empowered so as to have the same legal status and rights with their fellow women in the society. The women were also free to participate in the rural development through the reform. By 2015, it had seen several women Sarpanches and Heads initiating changes in education, health and sanitation within Panchayats. However, there are barriers which they faced like family pressure, deep rooted societal beliefs and lack of resources. Panchayati Raj has really promoted the empowerment of the women but still improvements are needed. Increased legal safeguards, increased material resources and women education with wholesome implementation of Panchayats will enable more effective process and therefore further empowerment of the Panchayati Raj system to the women of India.

Keywords: Panchayati Raj, Women Empowerment, Constitutional Amendment, Reservation, Women Leadership, Social Reforms.

Introduction:

The institution of Panchayati Raj in India forms a core system in rural development and democratic process. Locally, it allows communities to work on their problems and come up with measures to correct them. The system is entrenched in the Constitution itself but it got substantive recognition only after the process of the 73 rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992 which brought Panchayats into constitutional domain and ensured a 33% reservation to women. This reform is an angle in the women empowerment as it accorded women the fair access to political office and the leadership position in their districts. However, the involvement of women is faced by many barriers such as traditional gender roles, family needs, and shortages in resources. Nevertheless, in the Panchayati Raj setting, women play a role in controlling rural development, education, communal health, sanitation and others. The current research assesses the role of the system in the empowerment of women and outlines the main opportunities and constraints that have remained.

History of Panchayati Raj System:

The evolution of Panchayati Raj system is measured in centuries. The ancient village councils and local councils that acted as the earlier version of Panchayats were used by the population to settle disputes among communities. During colonial rule, these bodies were reduced by centralization and their performance dropped. After independence constitutional recognition of Panchayats was confirmed, although there was no strong constitutional protection of Panchayats. There was a new determination to revitalize Panchayati Raj with the introduction of a community development project in 1952. Formal institutes of Panchayats were opened in 1959 when Jawaharlal Nehru passed a pilot program in the district of Nagaur in the state of Rajasthan. This prodrome continued to be narrow in its applicability until the 73 rd Amendment, which gave constitutional validity to the Panchayats and provided that there should be the three tier system namely Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad. At the same time, the amendment allowed codifying 33 % women reservations that was a radical step towards the women political recognition. Over the course, the Panchayati Raj system has been used to consolidate Indian democratic process.

Meaning and Context of Women Empowerment:

Women empowerment refers to the granting of women equal rights and opportunities, responsibilities in the process of decision-making and allowing them to participate in social matters in a self-dependent manner. Women empowerment will facilitate the contribution to family and the community due to the creation of awareness on political, economic, and civil rights. Projected end goals comprise the unification of female individualities, achievement of societal equality, and the halting of structural, psychological, as well as physical restrictions. In this respect, the importance of the Panchayati Raj system is presumed. It offers women a level playing grounds in Gram Panchayats that gives them the freedom to raise issues, enter into administration, and to become leaders-which are all hitherto prohibited in the Indian society. The strength of women in politics is further enhanced in the 33 % reservation in the 73 rd amendment. All these reforms improve the position of women and make their life enriched.

Women participation in Panchayati Raj System:

The integration of women in Panchayati Raj system is a key developmental strategy whose benefits have greatly enhanced the political, social and economic capital of women. Following the 1992, 73rd Amendment to the Constitution, 33 percent reservation to women was effected in Panchayat institutions hence providing formal representation to women. This piece of legislation increased the political role of women and empowered them on the village level. The areas where women are present include Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, and Zila Parishads, each of which addresses women with the direct voice in local-level decision-making, as well as policy making. Many women have taken up such offices as Sarpanch, and Panchayat Head and by and thru these positions they have initiated many betterments at the educational standards, health standards, road building etc. and job creation. However challenges remain, incipient patriarchal directions, inculcated norms, and household demands are still inhibiting the indulgence of women. Despite all these obstacles, there

are numerous representatives of consonant collective leaders and they are already leading social improvement. Through entrenchment of their existence, these women have brought to the fore local issues of importance to women.

Challenges and Experiences of Women Representatives:

After the introduction of the 33 percent quota of reservation, the representatives of the female population have been facing numerous challenges. The first and most powerful can be the fixed societal mind-sets and customary gender assignments. Leadership roles in the past have always belonged to the men, and the power of women was not always that popular. The pressures of family are another insurmountable obstacle: the simultaneous requirement of household and Panchayat duties prove hard to balance. The women have been in most cases reduced into a mere paper Sarpanch with the essential decisions being made by male counterparts. However, there are women who have used such structures to positively make a difference in society. From the recent news the examples of Kanchan Devi and Rani Durgavati demonstrate such a path, they were Sarpanches and they improved educational level, health status, and sanitary conditions at the territories they worked on. Despite the opposition, they never gave up, and instead, it led to many developmental initiatives in their societies.

Role of Panchayati Raj in Women Empowerment:

In the 73rd Amendment, the Constitution of India acknowledged the central nature of the Panchayati Raj system in empowering women. The amendment has allowed the women to be active decision-making participants through setting aside 33 percent of the political office at the village levels for female representation. This was a very important move towards bringing women on board in politics and administration. Panchayati Raj then gave women a common platform to discuss freelance issues thus enabling their social status to rise. Determinants of Panchayati Raj in the area of empowerment of women are not limited to representation in elections; Panchayati Raj has led to the admission of women in the positions of leadership and in so doing, empowering women economically, socially and politically. Within the village leadership positions, the awareness about rights increased in women and the steps were taken to work on enhancing education, health, employment, water sources and sanitation. Specifically, Women Sarpanches and Heads, have implemented important employment opportunities to women and therefore increasing their economic self-sufficiency at large. Moreover, Panchayati Raj boosted women confidence and even empowered them to demand their right in the grass root level. Contrary to the conservative societal mind-sets and family pressures, engagement at the Panchayati Raj institutions helped to place the women in single entities and clarified their collective position when it came to the local governance.

Examples of Good Female Leadership in the system of Panchayati Raj:

Existing literature contains few remarkable incidences of good women leadership in Panchayati Raj. In the wake of 73rd Amendment, women received a reservation of 33 per cent in Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads. The recent news Kanchan Devi who is the Sarpanch of a distant village in Uttar Pradesh. she has become a symbol of rural reforms in the state. She successfully made use of the government schemes to make women self-productive economically. Similar trend is shown by example of Rani Durgavati, Head of village in Madhya Pradesh who provided a vast level of improvement in terms of sanitation, women health and education. These examples prove that leadership of women can initiate significant changes on the part of their communities. Therefore, the success of girls and women involvement in Panchayati Raj not only exposes their leadership abilities, but also the necessity of women participation in general processes of social change.

Need for Improvement in Women's Empowerment:

While the Panchayati Raj system has made efforts to politically and socially empower women, there is still a need for several reforms. There is thus need to be put in place structural reform measures that would enhance more involvement of women, extension of their rights, as well as the migration of more control to their decision making processes. Even though the 33 percent reservation system has generated institutionalized arenas of addressing women representation in the local governance, it has at the same time limited their real power. Even in all the jurisdictions, the Sarpanches who are women, are more of a face saving way of doing things, the real policy decisions continue to be made through how others may protect the male prerogative. Also, the ability of women to conduct the delegated roles of Panchayats is a point that is questionable since these roles require specific administrative and administration strengths that lack in the female population. Training programs should then specifically work around such shortages by ensuring that they provide well-structured teaching and mentorship programs. In tandem with this, legislative and policy improvement should occur to strengthen the power vested to women representatives in Panchayat mandate. More emphasis should also be placed on policy development and prioritization that concern various issues on the safety, health, education and employment of women that are burning issues at hand. Improved openness in the administration of Panchayats and continued publicity about the rights and entitlements of women are essential supporting steps as well.

Conclusion:

The Panchayati Raj system has provided a strong foundation of political agency and political voice to the women in terms of deciding policymakers which is a crucial mechanism; however, there is much more that is necessary. Unrelenting patriarchal values, economic and informational limitations, and social reluctance towards increasing the scope of women in society are key dynamic factors that are holding progress back. Institutionalisation of other rights and other areas of powers of the women in the Panchayati Raj bodies will be seen as crucial in actualising the

desired social, economic and political empowerment of the women. The Panchayati Raj system can then be considered as completely successful in empowering women only after women are treated with parity concerning rights and opportunities.

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