

Women Empowerment and Panchayati Raj.

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Abstract:

The Principle of gender equality and equity and protection of women's rights have been the prime concern in Indian thinking right from the day of independence. Accordingly the country's concern in safeguarding the rights and privileges of women found best expression in the constitution of India. Article 14 confers equal opportunities for men and women in the political, economic and social spheres. Article 15 prohibits discrimination against citizen on the ground of sex, religion, race, caste etc. and Article 15(3) empowers the state to make affirmative support in favour of women.

Keywords: Gender, Equality, Constitution, women.

Introduction:

According to Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, "Woman is the builder of nation's destiny. Though delicate and soft as lily, she has a heart, far stronger and bolder than of man. She is the supreme inspiration of man's onward march".

Empowerment is a multidimensional social process that helps people to gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their own communities and in their own society. Panchayati Raj is one of the best systems of empowering women. The participation of women in self government encompasses structural changes in the rural socio economic situation in order to achieve the prosperity and welfare, the ultimate goal of all development.

Women consist of half the population of our country, so there should be nearly half of women as well in the political sector. That is why we must encourage women as India is the largest democracy in the world, and we must act like it. Women are supposed to be given their status in society, in which NGOs and universities play a massive role in it. This gives women the opportunity to have more control over the management and other women can benefit from it. As India has a population consisting of 50% women, they have to be competing equally well in the local politics to forward the gender equality agendas. Women in politics can speak up for other problems faced by other fellow women and come up with measures for the betterment of other women.

Women and Panchayat:

The Central Council of Local Government first dealt the issue of reservation of seats for women in the Panchayats in the year 1957. The Balwantray Mehta Committee study team recommended co-option of the two women to the local bodies who are interested in the local work. The council however, categorically noted in 1958 in its fourth session that ideal position would be to keep half of the total seats reserved for women. In 1974, the committee on the status of women in India proposed formation of statutory women panchayat structure. The objective is to ensure greater political participation of rural women. The National Perspective Plan for women in 1988 focused on participation of women at all levels. It recommended 30% reservation for women in local bodies. With the enactment of the 73rd Amendment Bill the third generation of PRIs with a mandate for elected panchayat as the third tier of Government has started functioning. Unlike the previous panchayats the third generation panchayats have not only been vested with the power of implementation of schemes but also entrusted with the task of planning for ensuing equitable justice. Article 243(D) maintains reservation of not less than one third of the total number of seats for women.

After the 73rd Amendment Act, it, panchayats in India has acquired legal status to plan and implement their own development programmes. In other words, we can say that with the passing of the New Panchayati

Act, Panchayati Raj Institutions or self governing people's institution have gained precedence over all other formation at the local level in matters of governance. As a result of reservation of seats more and more women are participating in the panchayat functioning. Given the social background and conditioning of the women members the emphasis should be on capacity building through proper training in order to make them effective partners in the developmental programmes.

It is true that empowering women socio economically through panchayati raj is a decisive step towards greater interest of the society in general. All possible steps should be arranged to strengthen them to achieve their economic, social, cultural and political growth and welfare. The overall development of a nation requires maximum utilization of human resources without any discrimination. A more developed society is a more participant one. Though debates on reservation of seats for women in Parliament and State Legislatures still continues, decades after the enactment of 73rd and 74th Amendments, women in the remotest corners are now empowered to participate in the decision making process not only as ordinary members but also as chairpersons and deputy chairpersons. So, the participation of women in political process is a major step towards inclusive politics.

Panchayat is the backbone of many Indian villages since the beginning. Mahatma Gandhi was always in the support of **Panchayat Raj** and his dream came into reality with the 73rd amendment act, also known as the **Panchayati Raj Act**. This act provides a total of one-third of seats to the women including the reserved seats for the SC's and ST's. It also gave one-third of the total number of offices of chairperson reserved for the women.

The roles of women in the panchayat are:

- Participation in election
- Participation in rural development
- Participation in decision-making
- Practising participatory democracy

In the context of women participation in the panchayat and to make it more effective following recommendations have been suggested for empowering women through PRIs towards good governance.

1. There is the need to organize orientation training programme for the women as well as male representatives to prepare them to shoulder responsibilities in decentralized governance. Different training modules are required to develop for elected women representative at the district, block and the village to enable them to exercise power and responsibilities effectively.
2. Special campaign by joint efforts of governmental and non governmental agencies should be launched to generate awareness among the elected representatives of PRIs about different aspects of 73rd Amendment Act.
3. Training should be made mandatory for both officials and non- officials.
4. The state government must devolve adequate powers to the PRIs in accordance with the constitutional status to these institutions through 73rd Amendment Act by making requisite provision in their respective Panchayati Raj Acts.

Conclusion:

After the establishment of the Panchayat Raj institution, women have been getting better opportunities and also living up to the responsibilities given to them. This act has been a great opportunity for women to come out and participate in the administration in the field of politics. It gives them a platform to raise their voices and be heard. 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”. PRIs are great initiatives to make women strong either politically, economically, or socially.

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