

**EFFECT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN PANCHAYATHI RAJ SYSTEM IN UTTAR PRADESH**

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**ABSTRACT**

Women constitute more or less than half of the population of any country. But their involvement in politics is insignificant compared to men. Many psychological, social and physical factors hold women back from active political involvement. This is true as far as the state and national level politics is concerned. A democratic country cannot progress if energies of its half population are concerned in the kitchen only. After attaining independence Indian constitution ensured gender equality through various provisions and regulations. It was presumed that these rights would automatically get translated into political development of the women in the country. The issue of women's participation in politics cannot be viewed in isolation from the general position of women in a society but despite their vast strength, women occupy a marginalized position in the political system. Women's participation in mainstream political activity has important implications for the broader context of governance in any country. Reservation policy for women in the Panchayats can be an important instrumental measure for achieving improvement in their socio-economic status and empowering them. If reservations for women in Panchayathi Raj Institutions are to lead to their empowerment in real terms, social, economic and political conditions which facilitate and encourage their participation need to be created in India, Article 40 of the Indian Constitution lays down that the state shall take steps to organize village Panchayats.

**KEYWORDS:** Women, Panchayathi Raj

**INTRODUCTION**

The Panchayati Raj is a South Asian political system mainly in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. It is the oldest system of local government in the Indian subcontinent. The dream of 'Gram Swaraj' of Mahatma Gandhi and motto of 'Power to People' are essence of true democracy. The task of capacity building of these large numbers of Panchayats is quite gigantic exercise. As per the assessment of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj even after 20 years of enactment of 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act and also after having three rounds of Panchayat elections in many States in India the empowerment of Panchayats has not taken place as envisioned in the 73rd Constitution (Amendment) Act in 1992. The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution in 1992 gave Constitutional status to the Panchayats as institutions of local self government and also for planning and implementing programmes for economic development and social justice. The concept of Panchayati raj seemed for a while in the years after Indian independence to have disappeared permanently into the mists of India's romantic past. In the late twentieth century however the notion has returned once more to the political agenda, for a variety of reasons: strategic, practical, economic, and ideology. This paper sets out to trace in brief the origins of the concept of Panchayati, offers some historical examples of the Panchayat in use, and attempts an explanation as to why it should once again have assumed importance in the minds of politicians, NGOs and administrators. To begin with, we need to ask about the place of the Panchayat in Indian tradition, upon which one discovers that the modern usage of the term has an etymology which is not very indigenous.

## **THE CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

“As per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Women’s equality in power sharing and active participation in decision making, including decision making in political process at all levels will be ensured for the achievements of the goals of Empowerment. Empowerment of women is a critical issue that is being debated all over the world. This concept has its root in the women’s movement throughout the world and particularly by the Third world feminists it is since the mid-1980s that this term became popular in the field of development, especially with reference to women. Empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International Women’s in 1985 at Nairobi. In the present study women empowerment is presented as a concept that includes political level spheres of women’s lives”

“By the beginning of 1990s, the term ‘empowerment’ had entered the development discourse and was widely used with reference to women and gender equality. Development agencies (multilateral and bilateral) started using the term to replace the earlier terminology of ‘people’s participation’ and ‘women’s development.’ The World Conference at Beijing (1995) played a critical role in introducing the term to national governments for whom it soon became an attractive catch phrase”

## **EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA**

“The government of India has ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights to women. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is often described as an international bill of rights for women, the Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the platform for Action (1995) and other such instruments.’

‘The National Policy for the empowerment of women.’ For the beneficiaries of the women, the government has been adopted different schemes and programs i.e. the National Credit Fund for Women (1993), Food and Nutrition Board (FNB), Information and Mass Education (IMF) etc. The most positive development last few years has been the growing involvement of women in the Panchayati Raj institutions.’

‘There are many elected women representatives at the village council level. At the central and state levels too women are progressively making a difference. Today we have seen women chief ministers, women president, different political parties leader, well establish businessmen etc. The most notable amongst these are Mrs. Pratibha Devi Singh Patil, Sheela Dixit, Mayawati, Sonia Gandhi, Brinda Karat, Nazma Heptulla, Indira Nuye (pepsi-co), BJP leader Sushma Swaraj, Mamta Benarji, ‘Narmada Basao’ leader Medha Patekar, Indian Iron Woman, EX-prime minister Indira Gandhi etc.’ “Women are also involving in human development issues of child rearing, education, health, and gender parity. Many of them have gone into the making and marketing of a range of cottage products-pickles, tailoring, embroidery etc. The economic empowerment of women is being regarded these days as a sine-quo-non of progress for a country; hence, the issue of economic empowerment of women is of paramount importance to political thinkers, social thinkers and reformers”

## **WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS AND DEMOCRACY**

“Women’s participation in mainstream political activity has important implications for the broader arena of governance in any country. Direct political participation of women in local governance is a central human right in itself and enables the realization of a host of other human rights. Political voice and decision-making power concerning basic services, economic development and social justice are critical factors in challenging and transforming structural caste-class-gender discrimination, and enabling women to realize their fundamental rights. Political participation also demands accountability from state and non-state actors to guarantee and respect these women’s equal political voice and development. This requires a transformation of power relationships both within institutions of governance and in the women’s social environment”

“Political system and decision making process in the activities of rural area. Under the 73rd amendment of

constitution of Panchayati Raj Institution, one third of the total seats for scheduled caste, backward class, scheduled tribes and general caste women members in Grampradhan of village Panchayat, Block Panchayat, District Panchayat are reserved for women candidate. The objective of bringing improvement in the socio-economic condition of women could be successful only by taking suitable initiatives and measures for empowering them. Empowerment of women will not be possible unless they are provided proper representation in the political system.

### **PANCHAYATI RAJ IN UTTAR PRADESH**

“Uttar Pradesh brought in Panchayati Raj immediately after independence through the enactment of the UP Panchayat Raj Act, 1947. Following the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee a three-tier system of panchayats was established through the enactment of the U.P. Kshetra Samitis and Zilla Parishads Act, 1961 (now, renamed as UP Kshetra panchayats and Zilla Panchayats Adhiniyam, 1961). Following the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 in order to bring about conformity with the provisions of the Constitution, the Government of U.P. amended the two Acts named above, through the Uttar Pradesh Panchayat Laws (Amendment) Act, 1994”.

“The first Village Panchayat Act in Uttar Pradesh was enacted in 1920. Village level local bodies were set up to assist in the administration of civil and criminal justice, sanitation and other common concerns. However, the Panchs of the Panchayats set up under the Act were to be appointed by the Collector of the district, ruling out any chances of democratic self-government. Immediately after Independence, Uttar Pradesh enacted the United Provinces Panchayat Raj Act 1947 (also known as Uttar Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, 1947), which was signed by the Governor General on 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1947. Under this Act, three bodies were created – Gaon Sabha, Gaon Panchayat, and Panchayat Adalat or Nyaay Panchayats. To begin with, around 35,000 Gaon Panchayats and 8,000 Nyaa Panchayats started functioning for nearly 5.4 crore (the then) rural population of Uttar Pradesh.

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‘The Sixth general elections were successfully completed in year 1988 and a 30% reservation for the women representative was given during the same year. Following the 73rd Constitutional Amendment) Act, 1992 by the Government of India, the Government of Uttar Pradesh also amended the UP Kshetra Panchayats and Zila Panchayats Adhiniyam, 1961 to bring about conformity with the provisions of the Constitution through the Uttar Pradesh Panchayat Laws (Amendment) Act, 1994. As on March 31st, 2012, there were 51974 Gram Panchayats, 821 Kshetra Panchayats, and 72 Zila Panchayats established in Uttar Pradesh. Increasing presence of elected women representatives to the Panchayati Raj Institutions at various levels has certainly raised hope for women empowerment in Uttar Pradesh. The 2010 Panchayat elections have resulted in a phenomenally large number of women elected leaders, much beyond the reserved one-third seats”

### **STATUS OF WOMEN IN RURAL INDIA**

“Since Independence, the Government has introduced a number of path-breaking laws relating to women. Some of the important legislative measures include, among others, the Hindu Marriage Act (1955), The Hindu Succession Act (1956), Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act

(1971), Equal Remuneration Act (1976), Child Marriage Restraint Act (1976), Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act (1986), Pre-natal Diagnostic Technique (Regulation and Prevention of Measure) Act (1994), Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006), Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (2012), Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace – Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal Act (2013) and finally the Anti- Rape or Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (2015). Besides, various welfare measures have also been taken up by the Government from time to time to empower women.

### **THE 73rd CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT AND THE WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT**

“The 73rd &74th amendment to the constitution of India in 1992 was a major step towards democratic decentralization. It has led to greater participation & empowerment of Schedule Castes, Schedule Tribes and women in PRIs in the country. The reservation of seats in the 1993-94 election has brought in about eight lakhs women into political process in large numbers. Panchayat Raj Institutions have ushered in qualitative changes in the process of governance’s”<sup>22</sup> “Panchayati Raj, 73rd Constitutional Amendment and Women If reservations for women in Panchayati raj institutions are to lead to their empowerment in real terms, social, economic and political conditions which facilitate and encourage their participation need to be created”

“The Panchayats got a constitutional status in 1993, the Gram Shaba found place in it as the Vidhan Shaba of the village. (Women, SC, ST, OBC), got reserved seats to take part as chairpersons and members in the decision-making at the PRI level. Schedule XI, containing 29 powers, was laid down for devolution of powers to the PRIs. The District Planning Committee was proposed for preparing the plans for economic development and social justice at the district level. With the implementation of the State Acts as per the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment, a clear-cut role of the PRIs in rural development has been envisaged and the Government of India and different states are now increasingly seeking the assistance of the PRIs in implementation of various schemes and developments programmed. The government of India have invariably sought a meaningful involvement of the PRIs and carved out a specific role for them in the context of the (XI)- Schedule and the five-year plans”.

“The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India provide the legal basis for direct democracy at the local-level, both in rural and urban areas. The amendments stress the need to bring people belonging to marginalized groups into the political process by reserving seats for women and for people belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). It is envisaged that by mandating not less than one-third of the seats for women in local government bodies, the governance process at the local government level will reflect the voices of women and the concerns and issues that confront them”

### **IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION**

“Women’s participation may be used both for support by an agency and as a control device by the law-makers. Participation may be direct or indirect, formal or informal; it may be political, social or administrative in nature. Women’s participation in Panchayat Raj institutions may take many forms. It refers to all those activities which show the women’s involvement in the processes and administration, that is, participation in policy formulation and programme planning, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes meant for development target groups. In developing societies the traditional definition of people’s participation often becomes irrelevant due to lack of time, initiative, and resources of the citizen who fails to show the necessary enthusiasm or cooperation towards governmental programmes meant for their benefit.

“The state not only plays the key role in attempts at socio- economic transformation and modernization but also in promoting, what is called institutional participation. Government aid the government sought to create an institutional infrastructure to promote popular participation.

Panchayat Raj and community development programmes were introduced mainly so solicit women participation in the development administration of the government.'

“The community development programme was a method of soliciting community participation to assist the government authorities in improving the social, economic and cultural life of the women in the rural areas. The impact of the various developmental policies, plans and programmers implemented by the government”

## CONCLUSION

“The concept of empowerment of women is of recent origin.” The word empowerment” has been given currency by UN agencies during recent years. It is increasing of self that the constitutional goal of gender equality cannot be ensured as long as women are not empowered with modern education, employment, and ability to assert their self- respect, independence and autonomy to make choices, and opportunities a participate in development activities of the nation In recent years there have been explicit moves to increase women’s political participation. The 73rd and 74th constitutional Amendments in Indian constitution have created space for women in political participation and decision making at the grass root level by providing that 1/3 of the seats in local bodies all over the country be reserved for them with this representation of women in rural local bodies has become an area to be explored largely. Women representation in local bodies is an important criterion for assessing their role in politics.”

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