



## Role and Contribution of Women Empowerment in Panchayatiraj – An Evocative Study

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### ABSTRACT

*Women empowerment is the most used and discussed term today. The empowerment of women is becoming an increasingly popular term in human rights and developmental discourses. Women play significant role in all walks of life. Empowerment of women is a necessary basic condition for socioeconomic development of any society.*

*This paper is intended to focus on the empowerment of women in Panchayatiraj. The subject of empowerment of women has become a burning issue all over the world including India since last few decades. It is held that women now cannot be asked to wait for any more for equality. There was more concern in the last two decades towards increasing women's participation in political institutions thereby leading to empowerment. Leadership skill is necessary not just to govern but to change the nature of governance.*

### KEYWORDS :

### Introduction:

A Panchayat, in the traditional sense, is a body of 5 elders of the village who help resolve conflict amongst the villagers. In pre-independence India, legal provisions made it difficult for women to participate actively in politics. The major promise of democratic decentralization is that it brings more popular participation without discrimination between men and women. But, in spite of many conventions and time bound measurable goals, world statistics speak of deplorable state of women, and they are marginalized from enjoying the fruits and benefits of equality and independence status. Women in both socio-economic and political levels have been inferior to men in the context of Indian Society. The empowerment of women is becoming an increasingly popular term in human rights and developmental discourses. Women are playing bigger and bigger role in economic field: as workers, consumers, entrepreneurs, managers and investors. According to a report of The Economist, 'Women and the World Economy', in 1950, only one-third of American women of working age had a paid job. Today, two-thirds do, and women make up almost half of American's workforce. In fact, almost everywhere, including India, more women are employed, though their share is still very low. Empowerment of women is a necessary basic condition for socioeconomic development of any society. Empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors is essential to build stronger economies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for women, men, families and communities.

Inequalities between men and women and discrimination against women have also been age-old issues all over the world. Thus, women's quest for equality with man is a universal phenomenon. Women want to have for themselves the same strategies of change which menfolk have had over the centuries such as equal pay for equal work. Their quest for equality has given birth to the formation of many women's associations and launching of movements.

The position and status of women all over the world has risen incredibly in the 20th century. It has been very low in 18th and 19th centuries in India and elsewhere when they were treated like 'objects' that can be bought and sold. For a long time women in India remained within the four walls of their household. Their dependence on menfolk was total. There are two contentious practices which, however, can be resolved easily through requisite legislation. Firstly, the AC Nielson ORG-MARG study showed that about 87% of EWRs had contested only once and only 14% had been re-elected. Secondly, some states now have laws mandating a two-child norm for members of the Panchayat.

Two Acts have also been enacted to emancipate women in India. These are: Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and the Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act, 2006. The Domestic Violence Act recognizes that abuse be physical as well as mental.

The significant step in the decentralization process came after independence in 1948 when the Gram Panchayat Act was enacted. Par-

ticipation of women in political life is integral to the advancement of women. Therefore, the Government of India, through its constitutional provisions has undertaken endeavour to uplift the women as per men through Panchayatiraj System.

The most important ones are literacy, traditionalism, prejudices, economic dependency and the unfavourable political structure, with its high rate of predominantly male incumbency and slow turnover.

### Review of Literature:

Bargava and Subha (2002), define political empowerment 'as the capacity to influence decision making process, planning, implementation and evaluation by integrating them into the political system. It implies political participation which includes right to vote, contest, campaign, party membership and representation in political office at all levels and effectively influences decisions thereby leading to political empowerment'.

According to Siwal 'political empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, greater decision making power and control and to transformative action'. Political empowerment refers to the process by which women acquire due recognition on par with men, to participate in the development process of the society through the political institutions as a partner with human dignity.

Panchayat level	Number of panchayats	Elected representatives	Women %
District Panchayats	537	11,825	41
Intermediate Panchayats	6,097	1,10,070	43
Village Panchayats	2,34,676	20,73,715	40

### Source: M/o Panchayati Raj

### Women in Panchayati Raj

Political system and decision making process in seen clearly in the changes incorporated in the Panchayati Raj Institution. 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. This objective should be achieved at desired level through making the provision of linking and associating maximum number of women in political affairs even at the lowest level of political activity. In recently introduced Panchayati Raj Institution, the policy for reservation in favour of women has therefore, been thought as an important approach to maximize their participation in the local level.

### Conclusion & Suggestion

Educated women now feel that there is more to life than marriage. They can get most of the things they want (income, status, identity) without marriage, while they find it harder to find a suitable accom-

plished mate. This is why their marriage is delayed.

The women who reluctantly entered into politics showed great maturity in outlook, enthusiasm, increasing political consciousness and increasing perception of their role and responsibility.

Due to strong caste feelings women belonging to upper caste have not come forward to represent the Panchayat which provided an opportunity to the women from the labour and lower caste to emerge as a potential force in village politics.

The socio-economic background of these women showed that majority of them came from the lower income group particularly at the village Panchayat level.

A part of the increase of the female literacy rate can attribute to the presence of the women in Panchayat and their willingness of get educated.

Women are not only working for women's development but also really putting their interest in general matters and getting success also. So, the concept that women cannot lead in developmental process is found wrong.

The involvement of women leaders in different developmental works definitely increased their awareness and confidence in themselves.

In spite of such drawbacks and hurdles that still prevail, Indian women (especially educated) are no longer hesitant or apologetic about claiming a share and visibility within the family, at work, in public places, and in the public discourse.

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