



PANCHAYATI RAJ AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

India after attainment of independence, granted the right to franchise to all her adult population irrespective of caste, creed, religion and sex. No country can progress if the fifty percent of its population remains alienated from political activities and vis-a-vis confined themselves to the household drudgery and kitchen. It is true that reservation for women in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) have opened up huge vistas for their empowerment. The political scenario is changing at grass root level i.e., panchayati raj institutions having 33 per cent of women reservation which will increase up to 50 percent in future in the country. The present study was an effort to assess the role of Panchayats in participation as well as empowerment of women and also suggest some effective measures to achieve that goal. The present study reveals that some of the southern and western states are far more advanced than the northern and some of the eastern states. Bihar, otherwise not so impressive on other parameters, has provided for 50% reservation for women in PRIs and has given a huge impetus to their empowerment.

KEYWORDS : Panchayati raj, empowerment, Constitution, Amendment, women.

Introduction

Democracy ensures empowerment, while Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) guarantees participation of all segments of society in the process. Greater gender equality is the key to successful participation of women in any democracy. When independence was declared, Mahatma Gandhi observed: 'As long as women of India do not take part in public life there can be no salvation for the country; the dream of decentralization could never be fulfilled. I would have no use for the kind of Swaraj to which such women have not made their full contribution' (Usha, 1999). Women's empowerment, consists of a greater autonomy in decision-making to enable them to have greater control over their lives which involves many aspects such as economic opportunity, social equality, political representation, etc.

One of the major interventions used by women empowerment promoters is to empower women through the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) thereby to ensure their participation in the process of political decision making. The 73rd Amendment Act to the Constitution in 1992 is a major step towards political empowerment of women through Panchayati Raj Institutions. This has resulted in the entry of large number of women into decision making bodies in the rural areas, who were otherwise home makers. The 73rd constitutional amendment is milestones in the constitution of India. The present study makes an assessment of the participation level of the female representatives regarding in the working of PRIs.

Objectives of the study

To assess the women's empowerment in terms of participation of the female representatives in panchayati raj institutions.

Research Methodology

The research is based on secondary data. It's an exploratory and descriptive in nature. The secondary data is collected from various government records, web materials, review of past researches and other reports. Moreover, classification and tabulation of data have been prepared by applying suitable mathematical methods.

Women in Panchayat Raj System

Women constitute half of the humanity. Besides bearing and rearing of future citizens, they play significant role in every walk of life. In India as per 2011 census, women account for 586 million and represent 48.46% of the total population. With the advent of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, India today has more than 500 district panchayats, around 5,100 block panchayats and more than 2,25,000 village panchayats, approximately 90 municipal corporations, 1,500 municipal

councils, and 1,800 nagar panchayats. Also, there are 6,81,258 women elected to Gram Panchayats, 37,109 women to Panchayat at intermediate level and 3153 women Panchayats at district level.

There are a huge number of Panchayats working in different circumstances, the extent of empowerment of women varies from region to region. The percentage of women at various levels of political activity has shown in the Table 1. The table 1 depicted that woman in Gram Panchayats represented highest in Bihar (54.6 per cent), followed by Manipur (43.5 per cent), Karnataka (43.0 per cent), Sikkim (39.9 per cent), Arunachal Pradesh (39.4 per cent), Dadara & Nagar Haveli (39.4 per cent), Assam (39.2 per cent), Himachal Pradesh (39.1 per cent) and least in Kerala (30.3 per cent). Women in Panchayat Samities represented highest in Bihar (49.1 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (37.5 per cent), Andman & Nicobar Islands (37.3 per cent) and Pandicherry (37.0 per cent) (fig. 2). Women at Distict Panchayats reported highest in Bihar (49.8 per cent) followed by Manipur (45.9 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (41.5 per cent), Goa (40.0 per cent), Sikkim (40.0 per cent), Rajasthan (37.4 per cent) and Karnataka (37.1 per cent). In Uttar Pradesh, the representation of women in Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samities and District Panchayats was (38.8 per cent), (37.5 per cent) and (41.5 per cent) respectively.

Table 1.1 India: State wise number of Elected Representation of women in Panchayats in India

State/UTs	Gram Panchayat			Intermediate Panchayat			Zila Parishad			Representation at all levels as on 1 st March, 2013		
	Total	Women	%	Total	Women	%	Total	Women	%	Total	Women	%
Andhra Pradesh	208291	68736	33	14617	4919	33.6	1095	364	33.2	254487	85154	33.5
Arunachal Pradesh	6485	2561	39.4	1639	577	35.2	136	45	33	9336	3889	41.6
Assam	22898	8977	39.2	2148	791	36.8	390	135	34.6	26844	9903	36.9
Bihar	117397	64152	54.6	11537	5671	49.1	1157	577	49.8	136130	68065	50
Chhattisgarh	157250	53045	33.7	2977	1005	33.7	321	109	33.9	158776	85338	54.5
Goa	1509	514	34	0	NA	NA	50	50	40	1559	504	32.3
Gujarat	109209	36400	33.3	4161	1394	33.5	817	274	33.5	118511	39206	33
Haryana	66588	24406	36.6	2833	962	33.9	384	135	35.1	68152	24876	36.5
Himachal Pradesh	22654	8864	39.1	1676	596	35.5	251	92	36.6	27832	13947	50.1
Jammu & Kashmir	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Jharkhand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	53207	31157	58.6
Karnataka	91402	39318	43	3483	1519	41.2	1005	373	37.1	93507	41577	43.6
Kerala	16139	4904	30.3	2004	609	30.3	339	119	35.1	19107	9907	51.9
Madhya Pradesh	388829	133508	34.3	6851	2378	34.7	836	310	37	393209	198459	50.5
Maharashtra	223857	74620	33.3	3922	1307	33.3	1961	654	33.3	203203	101466	49.9
Manipur	1675	730	43.5	0	0	0	61	28	45.9	1723	836	48.5
Meghalaya	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Nagaland	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Odisha	85367	31121	36.4	6232	2208	35.4	854	301	35.2	100863	NA	50.0
Punjab	88132	30875	35.2	2422	866	35.7	209	68	32.5	84138	29389	34.9
Rajasthan	113710	40043	39.9	5257	2014	38.3	1008	377	37.4	109445	54673	50
Sikkim	891	356	39.9	0	0	0	95	38	40	1099	NA	50
Tamil Nadu	109308	36824	36.6	6524	2313	35.4	656	227	34.6	119399	41790	35
Tripura	5322	1832	38.8	299	106	35.4	82	28	34.1	5676	2044	36
Uttar Pradesh	703294	272239	38.8	65669	24674	37.4	2698	1122	41.5	779980	309511	40
Uttarakhand	33888	20319	36.5	3152	1078	34.2	360	138	38	42452	34494	56.1
West Bengal	49545	18150	36.6	8563	2953	34.5	720	248	34.4	51423	19762	38.4
Andaman & Nicobar	759	261	34.4	67	25	34.4	30	10	33.3	NA	-	-
Chandigarh	162	53	39.4	15	6	37.3	10	3	30	NA	-	-
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	114	45	38.8	0	0	0	11	4	36.3	NA	-	-
Daman & Diu	77	30	38.9	0	0	0	20	7	35	NA	-	-
NCT Of Delhi	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	-	-
Lakshadweep	85	32	37.6	0	0	0	25	9	36	NA	-	-
Pandicherry	913	330	36.1	108	40	37	NA	NA	NA	NA	-	-

Source: Ministry of Panchayat Raj, Government of India.

Positive and Negative aspects of Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI)

Positive Aspects

- Women are taking up the challenge and gearing themselves up to enter politics at lower level in the spirit of self-governance as committed Citizens.
- Through the experience of the Indian Panchayat Raj Institutions, more than one million women have actively entered in political life of India.
- Women's issues have come to the forefront at local level and consequently state and national level.
- PRIs through women can work on creation, development and promotion of Self Help groups, Cooperatives, MSMEs for better employment and livelihood options in rural areas.

Negative Aspects

- It has been found that the elected representatives are treated, as puppets in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Active participation in the form of involving in the decision-making process, budget preparation, planning etc. was found to be rare in case of women representatives.
- Due to male dominance elected women members are functioning more or less as dummies.
- Financial matters are not tackled by the women representatives and for this they depend upon their husbands or sons or any other male relatives.
- Attendance of elected women representatives in Gram Panchayat Meeting is found very low. Majority of them did not attend the meeting regularly.

Suggestions

Some suggestive actions are indicated below to enhance the scope of improvement-

- Women should be given education. Education will broaden their outlook and make them aware of their rights, duties and responsibilities in the society.
- Enhancement of training facilities and capacity building programmes of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs).
- Special quorum of women in Panchayat meetings reservation of seats alone cannot ensure the active participation of women in panchayati raj institutions. Therefore certain provisions should be made which mandates a minimum quorum of women in every Gram Sabha meetings.
- An important requirement for bringing about empowerment of rural women is to bring about an attitudinal change in both men and women.
- The media both print as well as electronic can also play an important role in creating awareness among the elected women representatives. It can act as an agent of political socialization for inculcating the values of gender equality and gender justice.

Conclusion

Due to 73rd amendment, over a million women have come out of their homes for the first time, to hold public office and to participate in public activities, making their presence in the power struggles once dominated by men. The successful Elected Women Representative (EWR), now act as kind of role models for the others. Without the system of reservation women would have had no role to play in grass roots politics in India as statistics show, 95 percent of women claimed they would never come to acquire positions in panchayats, if there were no provision of reserving seats for them (Centre for Women's Development Studies 1999).

Swami Vivekananda had said "That nation which doesn't respect women will never become great now and nor will ever

in future and in pursuit of making India a great nation, let us work towards giving women their much deserved status."

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