

## Women Empowerment and Political Participation in Panchayat Raj Institution



Political Science

KEYWORDS :

**Rekha H.**

Department of Political Science, Karnatak University Dharwad, Karnatak

**Dr. N.M. Sali**

Department of Political Science, Karnatak University Dharwad, Karnatak

The government of India had shared the new millennium by declaring the year 2001 as "women empowerment year" The last decades have witnessed some basic changes in the status and role of women in our society. Empowerment of women has been recognized as a central issue in determining the status of women empowerment is a process, not an event, which challenges traditional power, equation and relations. Decentralized planning is supposed to give an appropriate way to deal with their concerns and problems through local grass root participation.

The decentralized planning set up gramasabha with a mission of ensuring women's participation in local governance as well as in decision making and to facilitate women empowerment in all dimensions.

### WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment can be viewed as means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for social transformation. It strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experience (Hashemi Schuler and Riley, 1996).

Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing individual to think, take action and control work in an autonomous way. It is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of one's lives. Empowerment includes control over resources (physical, human, intellectual and financial) and over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes). (Baltiwal, 1994). It is not merely a feel of greater extrinsic control, but also grows intrinsic capacity, greater self-confidence and an internal transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers to accessing resources or changing traditional ideology (Pinto, 2001).

Women's empowerment is very essential for the development of society. Empowerment means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercises choice and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. As per the United National Development Fund for women (UNIFEM), the term women's empowerment means:

Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed.

Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.

Gaining the ability to generate choices exercise bargaining power.

Developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

Thus, empowerment means a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights. It is a multi level construct referring to individuals, organizations and community.

### DECENTRALIZATION

In India the focus on rural development started with the realization of the fact the rural sector was underdeveloped. Adoption of the policy of 'Development' through planning was an apt and rational choice. The phase Started precisely in 1951, with the inauguration of the first five year plan.

In the year 1952 is significant as it ushered in community development projects and programs for developing the rural sector. Community development was conceived as basically a programs of the people with reasonable amount of technical and financial assistance from government.

In 1957, it was felt that people's participation was not coming forth to a desirable extent and because of that reason community development programs and schemes could not make a satisfactory progress. In order to generate more enthusiasm and evoke more participation from the people in the process of rural reconstruction, a committee was appointed by the planning commission of India headed by Balwant Rai Mehta to study the working of the community Development Programme in India and suggest how best the community development program could be implemented and maintained with vigour. The committee suggested a number of reforms among which democratic decentralization was significant. This institutional arrangement, later on came to be known as the panchayat raj. The committee gave the blue print of a three tier panchayati raj system which was to be introduced in all the states and union territories of the Indian union. This provided for the village panchayat to be made statutorily responsible for a good deal of the development program at the village level.

Panchayat Raj system was an innovation in the field of institution building. They are basically political institutions and are seats of power and authority. Most of the development activities of the rural areas are channeled through these institutions.

Thus Panchayati Raj movement started with all fan-fare, enthusiasm, laudable objectives and hopes as the result of Balwant Rai Mehta Committees Historical report of 1957. It was widely thought that Panchayati Raj would bring democracy at the door of the rural people, that it would evoke people's participation in the decision making and implementing program and schemes which, by and large, determine their destiny. It would also accelerate the process of social and economic development oriented leadership in the rural areas. The committee recommended the creation of three tier system as the institutional arrangement to make people's participation meaningful and effective. Necessary legislation was to be enacted by every states to implement the Panchayat Raj system as form of local self government to perform developmental administrative and political tasks. Rajasthan was the first state to implement Panchayat Raj system. Late Pandit Jawaharalal Nehru inaugurated it in Rajasthan on 2nd October, 1959 and in his inaugural address called Panchayat Raj as a revolutionary and historical step. Other states were supposed to follow suit. Some states such as Andhra Pradesh, Uttarpradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Orissa and Gujarat showed serious concern by enacting necessary legislation and theredy imple-

menting democratic decentralization scheme, while others took it easy and some showed implied reluctance. It may be recalled here that Panchayat Raj was the outcome of national consensus. The committee made several recommendation of three tier system of democratic decentralization was most significant. The three-tier system would be made of popular bodies at three levels viz; village, block and district. The name for this scheme of democratic decentralization in rural India have been functioning since time immemorial the way the committee envisaged their structuring and functioning make them altogether different from their counterparts in the past. So, as they have to suit to the new perspectives and demand of the modern times. Thus the committee ushered in a new era of rural local government in India. Five principles were however emphasized .

There should be a three-tier structure of local self governing bodies from village to district levels, with an organic link from the lower to the higher ones.

There should be a genuine transfer of power and responsibility to these bodies.

Adequate financial resources should be transferred to these bodies to enable them to discharge these responsibilities.

All developmental programmes at these levels should be channeled through these bodies.

The system evolved should be such as to facilitate further decentralization of power and responsibility in the future.

Based on these broad suggestions of the study team, the country was covered with Panchayat Raj institution in the succeeding decades. The centre issued only general directions about the broad pattern of the system. In some states like Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh Three-tier system was established in some other states like Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir one tier system was adopted and in some other State like Assam, Himachal Pradesh only two tier system was constituted. However, village Panchayats are now responsible for implementing the schemes and plans and to mobilize the people's participation for the implementation of development schemes and projects, which from a programme for the development of the nation. The Panchayat Raj institutions appear to have been successful in the beginning. However, there was a definite decline in their functioning after 1969. The development schemes did not flow through Panchayatsamities. Panchayat Raj institutions were by-passed; administrative will was lacking and bureaucracy had its role in dis-associating the Panchayat Raj institutions from development programmes. There was complete lack of political will State government postponed their elections for long durations; some states suspended them and some states replaced them by ad-hoc nominated bodies. There was perceptible non cooperation of members of parliament and members of legislative assemblies towards PanchayatRajbecause they perceived a threat to their position from the emerging PanchayatRaj leadership in their respective constituencies. Thus Panchayat Raj institutions were not given a chance to grow themselves as effective local governments.

Panchayat Raj is an important feature of the Indian Political System which ensures direct participation of people at the grass roots level. Through Panchayats have been in existence in India since ancient times, they suffered a set-back during British rule. After Independence the frames of the constitution decided to give them important and directed the states to "organize village Panchayats as units of self-government" (Article 40). Following the directive, the various state government took steps to organize village Panchayats as units of rural self-government. Greater important was attached to the Panchayat system after adoption

of the five years plan and launching of the community Development Programme.

In 1956, the national development council appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Balwantrai G. Mehta to suggest measures for the better working of the community development programme and the national Extension Service. The committee submitted its report in 1957 in which it recommended:

- A three-tier structure consisting of the village at the bottom, district at the top and an intermediary structure in between;
- Genuine Transfer of power and responsibility to these institutions;
- Adequate resources to all bodies to enable them to discharge their responsibilities;
- That all social and economic development programmes be channelized through these agencies;
- That a system be evolved to effect further dissolution and dispersal of power.

The recommendations of the committee of the committee were approved by the National Development Council in January, 1958. This set the stage for the launching of Panchayat Raj institutions throughout the country. Although the broad fundamentals were to be identical, it did not insist on rigidity regarding the form and pattern. The states were free to evolve their own patterns suitable to local conditions.

The three-tier system of Panchayat Raj was first adopted by Rajasthan on October 2, 1959; this was followed by Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. Gradually the Panchayat Raj system was adopted by most states even though the system differed in matters of detail.

From October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1959 when the first Raj was inaugurated, on April 24, 1993 after the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment act came into force it has been an uncertain and undulating journey for panchayats.

#### EMPOWERMENT AND PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS

Women empowerment is critical to socio economic development of the community and it is a tool of bringing women into the mainstream of national development as participants and not mere beneficiaries. Decentralized planning opens up the opportunity for women's participation in local governance as well as in decision making and has the potential to facilitate women empowerment in all dimensions.

Women empowerment plays a vital role in the progress of a family, community, nation and the world as a whole. Women empowerment emphasizes women's decision making roles, their economic self reliance, and their legal rights to equal treatment, inheritance and protection against all forms of discrimination.

The constitutional amendment on local governance through Panchayat Raj institutions (PRIS) sought to create for the first time a space for women empowerment. Identification of the felt needs of the people was the major objective in the decentralized plan process. GramaSabha is supposed to ensure maximum participation of people specially women and other weaker section.

The literal meaning of decentralization is transferring decision making powers and functions from the central government or state government to the local bodies with a view to transform the society and injects a greater degree of efficiency. Democratic decentralization seeks to associate the peoples participation in the decision making powers at the local level. There exists a triangular relationship between decentralization, democracy and development.

The panchayat Raj as a system of self governance was introduced as per the Balwantraimehata committee report that recommended a three – tier structure of local self governments. The 64<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment bill was introduced in the 1989 and this provided for 30 per cent reservation for women. Later

the act constitutionally reserved 33 per cent of all seats in panchayat and municipalities for women. Finally, in 2009 the union cabinet on Thursday, august 27 approved 50 per cent reservation for women in all panchayats across the country.

**Table - 4**

**ಪಟ್ಟಿ - 4**

**ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ರಾಜ್ಯದ 2015-16ರಲ್ಲಿ 64-66-2015 ರಲ್ಲಿ ನಡೆಸಿದ ಸಾರ್ವಜನಿಕ ಚುನಾವಣೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಸ್ತ್ರೀಗಳ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ ಮತ್ತು ಶೇಕಡಾ**

S. No.	ಜಿಲ್ಲೆ	S. No.	ಜಿಲ್ಲೆ	ಸಾರ್ವಜನಿಕ ಚುನಾವಣೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಸ್ತ್ರೀಗಳ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಸ್ತ್ರೀಗಳ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಪುರುಷರ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಒಟ್ಟು ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಸ್ತ್ರೀಗಳ ಶೇಕಡಾ	ಜಿಲ್ಲೆಗಳ ವಿವರ																									
									ಬೀದರ್		ಬೀದರ್		ಬೀದರ್		ಬೀದರ್		ಬೀದರ್		ಬೀದರ್		ಬೀದರ್		ಬೀದರ್		ಬೀದರ್		ಬೀದರ್		ಬೀದರ್		ಬೀದರ್			
									ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಶೇಕಡಾ	ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಶೇಕಡಾ	ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಶೇಕಡಾ	ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಶೇಕಡಾ	ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಶೇಕಡಾ	ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಶೇಕಡಾ	ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಶೇಕಡಾ	ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಶೇಕಡಾ	ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಶೇಕಡಾ	ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಶೇಕಡಾ	ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಶೇಕಡಾ	ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಶೇಕಡಾ		
1	ಬೀದರ್	217	2234	153	145	1936	0	0	2081	2099	312	521	14	203	217	64	174	240	32	7	39	664	400	1064	955	1096	3081							
2	ಬೀದರ್	227	3399	2	109	3288	0	0	3397	74	242	216	42	235	277	328	453	783	104	96	197	1095	729	1824	1640	1757	3397							
3	ಬೀದರ್	155	2388	0	272	2116	0	0	2388	27	159	186	31	166	197	259	323	582	66	79	145	778	510	1288	1161	1237	2388							
4	ಬೀದರ್	254	3589	116	411	3062	0	0	3473	304	430	734	5	243	248	222	336	558	77	61	133	1079	727	1800	1676	1797	3473							
5	ಬೀದರ್	302	4219	3	83	4133	0	0	4216	51	122	174	48	127	175	58	136	194	37	9	46	390	237	627	585	631	4216							
6	ಬೀದರ್	230	3826	9	486	3350	0	0	3816	231	333	566	2	226	228	368	460	828	97	132	209	1156	829	1985	1856	1960	3816							
7	ಬೀದರ್	266	4744	12	229	4493	0	0	4732	429	570	999	266	455	721	208	344	550	80	56	136	1315	1011	2326	2236	2436	4732							
8	ಬೀದರ್	129	2157	1	108	2043	0	0	2146	250	319	569	32	183	275	70	139	209	39	8	47	590	456	1046	1041	1105	2146							
9	ಬೀದರ್	481	8467	140	1069	7258	0	0	8327	369	676	1045	230	630	860	734	959	1893	217	239	436	2491	1801	4293	4042	4285	8327							
10	ಬೀದರ್	210	3526	16	539	3380	0	0	3510	387	482	869	8	209	217	282	383	665	87	85	172	1139	848	1987	1903	3007	3510							
11	ಬೀದರ್	197	3265	28	333	2904	0	0	3213	349	346	595	65	220	285	229	340	569	75	71	146	928	714	1642	1546	1691	3213							
12	ಬೀದರ್	136	1960	35	140	1785	0	0	1925	47	144	186	25	135	160	180	263	443	71	45	111	612	408	1030	930	995	1925							
13	ಬೀದರ್	116	1706	11	116	1579	0	0	1695	320	390	710	28	119	147	111	184	295	51	27	78	507	358	865	817	878	1695							
14	ಬೀದರ್	206	2967	0	184	2783	0	0	2967	344	291	457	96	236	332	172	342	514	99	37	156	903	625	1528	1416	1531	2967							
15	ಬೀದರ್	230	2732	13	280	2438	0	0	2719	53	252	305	14	227	241	225	365	590	78	48	127	981	525	1456	1301	1418	2719							
16	ಬೀದರ್	81	2373	4	360	2009	0	0	2369	237	288	525	14	96	116	196	229	419	47	54	100	677	537	1214	1165	1204	2369							
17	ಬೀದರ್	96	1758	0	130	1628	0	0	1758	194	236	432	80	195	195	86	145	231	37	35	56	507	397	904	854	904	1758							
18	ಬೀದರ್	120	1956	4	254	1698	0	0	1952	166	222	388	8	128	128	121	215	336	43	31	94	590	416	1006	848	1004	1952							
19	ಬೀದರ್	186	3367	2	270	3095	0	0	3365	370	476	846	781	399	680	68	166	234	43	7	50	876	679	1555	1638	1727	3365							
20	ಬೀದರ್	224	3218	22	267	2929	0	0	3196	336	445	781	175	325	500	103	202	305	41	38	59	892	659	1551	1547	1649	3196							
21	ಬೀದರ್	156	2790	3	204	2583	0	0	2787	403	471	874	58	128	236	62	160	222	40	5	45	795	633	1410	1358	1429	2787							
22	ಬೀದರ್	152	2482	34	88	2360	0	0	2448	303	377	680	136	222	358	46	115	155	22	1	23	681	551	1232	1182	1266	2448							
23	ಬೀದರ್	261	2862	5	167	2690	0	0	2857	201	387	588	19	163	282	131	306	437	74	11	88	981	583	1464	1356	1501	2857							
24	ಬೀದರ್	180	5368	12	314	5042	0	0	5356	467	645	1112	152	392	544	268	496	764	130	72	202	1578	1156	2734	2595	2781	5356							
25	ಬೀದರ್	179	3199	28	202	2969	0	0	3171	370	469	839	223	307	528	64	148	212	28	7	35	861	694	1557	1546	1625	3171							
26	ಬೀದರ್	196	3691	13	488	3190	0	0	3678	391	482	873	354	468	822	71	155	226	33	14	47	927	787	1710	1727	1906	3678							
27	ಬೀದರ್	174	3458	99	525	2834	0	0	3359	322	434	736	351	461	812	68	142	230	35	13	48	857	696	1553	1633	1726	3359							
28	ಬೀದರ್	243	4214	30	406	3777	1	0	4183	531	643	1174	22	244	266	389	335	504	89	39	128	1192	919	2111	2003	2180	4183							
29	ಬೀದರ್	121	2342	52	346	1944	0	0	2290	268	328	596	117	203	320	72	135	207	33	36	49	621	497	1118	1111	1179	2290							
30	ಬೀದರ್	148	2677	20	174	2483	0	0	2657	225	296	521	149	237	386	115	206	321	54	27	81	747	601	1348	1290	1367	2657							
	ಒಟ್ಟು	5837	94344	867	8675	84790	11	1	93465	7748	10349	18797	3053	7634	10687	5138	8354	13496	1971	1296	3267	27808	19915	47218	45213	48252	93465							

Source : State Election Commission Karnataka-2015. Above this table indicates the participation of women in Panchayat Raj. In Karnataka state total grampanchayats 5837 and elected women representatives are 48252. This data shows that political participation most positive development last few years has been growing involvement of women in the panchayat.

**Conclusion :**

In Indian constitution, there are provisions for equal rights for

all citizens irrespective of their social, and economic status. Since access to political opportunities and participation in political decision making process are important components of capability and autonomy discrimination in this respect leads to wastage of women's talent and efficiency which are necessary for all around development of the country. It may be considered that to achieve the women empowerment, advancement can be facilitated with the coordination of different sections of the society.

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