A Study on Role of Women in Panchayat Raj

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Abstract - The 73rd Constitutional Amendment was passed in the hopes that it would improve governance and give political space to groups that have historically faced discrimination, such as women, schedule castes, and schedule tribes. Panchyati Raj institutions have long been seen as a means to good governance. The goal of the current research was to understand the position of women in Panchayat raj and the issues they encounter.

Keywords - Women, Women Empowerment, Role, Panchayat Raj

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INTRODUCTION

As a biological category, women make up half of the sexes and almost all of the population of a nation. According to the 2011 census, there are 58.65 crore women. It is a known fact that there are much more women in India than there are people overall in many other nations. It seems sense to assume that Indian women would be monetarily independent, socially powerful, and politically influential. However, this is not the case. Indian ladies often have extremely weak foundations. Whether it is to politics, health, the economics, education, or any other aspect of development, they still have to suffer from social prejudice (1).

A lady completes the circle. She has the capacity to invent, nurture, and change. The idea of Nari Shakti has been part of Indian culture for all of time. She has long been regarded as the embodiment of Shakti, capable of doing what men are powerless to. They will even outperform their male counterparts if given the proper resources. The wellbeing of people, families, and communities, as well as total economic output and participation in civic affairs, depend on their being empowered.

Despite their number, women in India face a variety of issues, including low literacy rates, poor health, limited political engagement, a high incidence of maternal mortality, fewer representation in assemblies and parliament, and more. According to a UNDP study, despite the fact that women do 67 percent of the world's labour, just 10% of worldwide income and 1% of global property are held by women. 2. Women are given special attention due to their size, pitiful state, low degree of political engagement, absence from the decision-making process, and lack of representation in Panchayati Raj institutions, legislatures, and parliament.

First off, without active engagement from women, the concepts of gender equality, mainstreaming women, good governance, etc. are not viable. Therefore, they are under stress.

Second, empowering women is essential since they make up more than half of the population in villages and face discrimination in every way. A key component of women's empowerment is political empowerment. Without the political engagement and empowerment of a sizable portion of the people, a nation cannot develop. Women are therefore given more emphasis.

Thirdly, it is a contradiction that, despite the fact that women dominate a number of sectors in contemporary Indian society in general and rural society in particular, the majority of them still experience poverty, oppression, exploitation, and neglect. In the mainstream of development and the decision-making process, they are not taken into consideration. Even their contributions to many fields are overlooked. Women are therefore given more emphasis.

Fourth, it is certain that the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian Constitution (1993) allowed for the reservation of seats in local governments, creating a solid framework for their involvement in local decision-making. But the truth is rather different. Women legislators are not the ones who make political choices; rather, it is their in-laws. Women are therefore given more emphasis.

Fifthly, political empowerment of women in general and women representatives in particular acquires more relevance in the context of globalisation, liberalisation, and gender equality.

The degree of gender equality and the participation of women in politics are now used to determine a country's greatness, rather than how it ranks in the world economic order. Given that there are more women than males in India, their political engagement and the function of elected women representatives are essential to the country's progress. Women are therefore given more emphasis.

Sixthly, there is a large gap between the actual and prospective output of elected women's representatives. Therefore, it is necessary to have a complete grasp of their current performance and potential so that training, development, and awareness-raising activities may be focused in their favour. This will hasten their participation in the nation's political processes. As a result, women are under pressure.

Seventhly, efforts made by government and NGO-elected women representatives have minimal impact on national politics in general and gramme panchayat administration in particular, despite constitutional requirements to the contrary. In terms of decision-making, asset-making, participation in welfare programmes, and the development of a gender-just society, their political activity and role had minimal impact on the lives of village or rural residents in general, and rural women in particular. Women are hence the focus.

The eighth point is that enabling women representatives to take on more active roles in gramme panchayat administration helps a nation's socioeconomic growth. Women thus cannot be disregarded, especially when developing and executing diverse socioeconomic development strategies.

The ninth point is that as elected women representatives are the lifeblood of village or rural development, it is crucial to fully comprehend their role status, degree of empowerment, and potential. Such knowledge would demonstrate the extent of their contribution to the growth of the panchayat and the management of the gramme panchayat. There are, of course, a relatively small number of skewed and incomplete research on women representation. Additionally, because of the constraints under which they were done, these studies do not provide a true and comprehensive picture of their involvement, function, and contributions (2).

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Increasing a person's or a community's spiritual, political, social, or economic strength is referred to as empowerment. It speaks about the capacity to decide on individual or societal conditions. It denotes the capacity for assertive behaviour during group decision-making. It also refers to the procedure for giving underprivileged persons access to fundamental chances. Women's empowerment is a topic that is often discussed. Women may achieve their entire identity and strength in all sectors of life via the multi-dimensional process of empowerment. The capacity of women to manage responsibilities, imagine a better future, and also to go through the challenges they face is referred to as empowerment. It also entails moving women from the margins to the centre in terms of their standing in the socioeconomic, political, and legal spheres. It aids in maximising women's potential in practically every industry. It criticises patriarchal ideology and gender-based discrimination against women in all societal organisations and systems (3).

Women need to be empowered on many different levels, including politically, economically, socially, psychologically, legally, and technologically. Political empowerment is the process of giving women and men equal political authority, equal opportunity to hold office, and the elimination of all forms of political discrimination against women.

NEED FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women are an essential component of society. Women make up the same percentage of the population as males, yet their interests, chances, and opportunities are not equal. For generations, their education, rights, and even way of life have been disregarded. Since ancient times, they have been oppressed, bound by patriarchal traditions and conventions, and silenced by society under the guise of religious traditions, customs, and social codes. They have been restricted to the four walls of their houses and denied access to basic education, economic and social independence, as well as healthcare and information. Although they make a major contribution in terms of physical labour, revenue creation, etc., they have a little role in economic security and decision-making. Numerous social reformers, including Lord William Bentick, Kandukuri Veeresalingam, Eswara Chandra Vidya Sagar, and Sri Raja Rammohan Roy, worked tirelessly to improve the miserable circumstances of Indian women. They have advocated for the freedom of women in our nation. Since independence, the situation of women has increasingly improved. However, the shift is just marginal and remains extremely low in comparison to the rest of the globe. It has been acknowledged that women themselves must effect change in the status of women. To modify their position, which will lead to societal changes as well, women must be given more influence. For the purpose of empowering women in politics, the Indian government proposed the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments (4).

To "empower" is to provide authority or power. The general definition of this phrase is to provide individuals and groups more autonomy and self-determination so they may act responsibly and autonomously on their own behalf to promote their

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interests. It is seen as a method of securing fundamental opportunities and developing their inherent abilities.

It is a method that alters current power structures by focusing on the three resources that make up the three dimensions: material, human, and intellectual resources. It is a process that must question and alter ideology, the body of thoughts, behaviours, and customs in which social biases like caste, class, regionalism, and communalism are ingrained. Many empowerment programmes are ineffectual at improving gender relations in the long run because they don't address the mindset.

Without measuring gender parity, democratic decentralisation would be worthless. Any society's speed of growth would be slowed down if women, who make up around 50% of the population, were not given the opportunity to participate in it. India, which has more females than any other country in south-east Asia combined (nearly 450 million), has a far larger pool of women's power (5).

To eradicate injustice, gender prejudice, and inequality, women must be empowered. Empowerment is a technique of obtaining adequate legal protection as well as a potent instrument against the exploitation and abuse of women. Women may build their identities when they are socially and economically empowered. Because they make up a significant portion of the world's population, women's lack of work will have a negative impact on the global economy. Women are very intelligent and creative, thus it is crucial to increase their engagement and participation in socioeconomic activities. Women must be given equal chances in all disciplines if society is to thrive and develop.

It is widely known that empowering women economically has a positive impact on families, communities, and economies. In the family, women often act as change agents. Despite doing 60% of the world's labour and earning just 10% of its money, women reinvest 90% of their earnings into their families (5).

PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTION EVOLUTION IN INDIA

India in the past was ruled by village republics. They displayed the greatest democratic ideals in both its structure and operation. The Panchayati members were chosen by lot or by consent, although their screening was very strict. The Panchayati had a crucial role in advancing the village's economic, moral, and intellectual development.

Historical Background

To paraphrase Sydney Webb, local self-government is "as ancient as the hills." India may be the only

nation in the world where this is possible. The institution of local self-government is virtually prehistoric, and the idea of local self-government is indigenous to the Indian subcontinent, according to enough evidence. Village Panchayatis, a vital component of national life that endured centuries of political instability, served to retain democratic traditions in social, cultural, economic, and political life when empires rose and fell. The presence of local bodies in ancient India is evidence that our people have the natural ability to administer local issues effectively and decentralizedly (5).

The Mauryan and Gupta dynasties had unusually decentralised systems of government. Up until recently, the western world was unaware of this power transfer.

Local Self-government during the British Rule

It is simple to categorise the development of local self-government in India during the British era into four stages.

When Lord Rippon published his renowned resolution on local self governance in 1882, the first phase is generally seen as having come to an end. The second phase includes events from 1882 to 1919, a time during which greater authority was given to the provinces by the federal government and various modifications to local self-governance were recommended in the Decentralization Commission's 1907 proposals in addition to other topics. The third phase, which lasted until 1935, saw the Indian Taxation

The issues with municipal taxes were taken into account by the Enquiry Committee in 1925 together with federal and provincial budgets. The Simon Commission of 1930 recommended tight governmental supervision over local authorities, reversing the decentralisation progress. The fourth phase includes advancements made through 1947. The fight for independence was strengthened during this era, and local bodies, notably village Panchayatis, were greatly stimulated and democratically elected as a result of the advent of provincial autonomy in 1937 and the election of congress ministries to power in many provinces (6).

As stated in the Directive Principles of State Policy, which were enshrined in the Constitution and created a federal system of public administration, offered universal adult franchise, and the goal of a welfare state, independence marked the beginning of a new era in socioeconomic changes. According to Article 40 of the Constitution, the government must take action to create autonomous organisations known as local Panchayatis (7).

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Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs): Developments in the post-Independence period

Although the concept of decentralised planning is as ancient as Gandhian economic theory, efforts to give this theory a tangible form may be regarded as having been undertaken in the post-independence era. In order for the benefits of development to reach the people at the grass-roots level and for people to participate in the process of planning and development at different levels, some difficult decisions had to be made during the constitution-making process and since the beginning of planning in India. These decisions had to be made between the considerations of achieving a measure of distributive justice, on the one hand, and the needs of national security, national unity, and economic growth, on the other. Over time, the decision was taken in favour of fast development and planning; as a result, the Union and the state continue to serve as the focal points for vertical decision-making. Generally speaking, local organisations like panchayatis served as civic agents of the state government rather than as tools for micro-level planning.

After being freed from colonial domination, India sought to change the Indian countryside using Gandhian principles. Gandhiji equated the concept of an independent India with an improvement in rural life in India. He often emphasised to the populace that the villages are where India's soul is found and that true independence and the dawn of a new era of social and economic justice can only come when the villages are awakened and rise to their full potential. The Panchayati will manage the village's administration. Therefore, authority should be decentralised, and the local Panchayatis should be granted full legislative, executive, and judicial authority (8).

Balwant Rai Mehta Committee

The first committee established in January 1957 to address the issues with democratic decentralisation in independent India was the Balwant Rai Mehta committee. The research team focused on National Extension Service and Community Development. The Community Development Program was put under examination by the committee, which was led by Shri Balwant Rai Mehta. One of the tasks given to the team was to research "the organisational structure and work processes with a view to achieving a faster speed in the dispatch of business," among other things. This committee recommended the development of "Panchayati Raj" or "Democratic Decentralization" in their report, which it turned in around the end of 1957. As a result, they recommended devolution of development and decentralisation of the administrative apparatus with adequate delegation of powers to the Panchayati Raj Institutions because they believed that public enthusiasm for development could only be sustained when the development machinery functions under the control of elected representatives of the people. It suggested creating democratic entities that are elected and organically connected at the village, block, and district levels and giving these bodies control over all planning and development tasks (9).

Panchayati Raj Institutions various Patterns

The Panchayati Raj Institutional Structure in India differed from state to state and was created by several state lawmakers. At the Village, Block, and District levels, some states had a 3-tier structure of Panchayatis, while others had a 2-tier system. A single-tier Panchayati existed in a few states exclusively at the village level.

In contrast to the concepts offered by the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee and the Asoka Mehta Committee, the PR Reform Act of 1985 provided a special model in Karnataka. The Act established a three-tier PR system, with the district-level Zilla Parishad, the taluk/block-level Taluk Panchayati Samiti, and the mandal-level Mandal Panchayati. In Karnataka, all duties and personnel from the district and lower levels of the development departments were transferred to Panchayati Raj Institutions. All formally recognised governmental organisations, such as the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), that deal with the execution of certain centrally supported anti-poverty programmes were combined with the Zilla Parishad. The Mandal Panchayati idea was adapted to local circumstances from the Asoka Mehta Committee Report. Karnataka was the first and only state up to this point to give the idea a tangible form (10).

The Karnataka experiment intended to replace the storied District Collector with the Zilla Parishad in order to coordinate the officials at the district level. The Vice-President was given the status of Deputy Minister, while the President of the Zilla Parishad was given the rank of Minister. The District Chief Minister was referred to as the Zilla Parishad President in the area (11).

The Asoka Mehta Committee

The committee was established to implement changes to local self-governments. In December 1977, the Janata Party administration established a high-level committee on PRIs, headed by Asoka Mehta, with 14 members from various parties. The Committee's report, which was delivered in August 1978, included 300 pages and 11 chapters. It was incorrect to see the PR as "a god that failed," according to the research. The report claimed that while it "has many accomplishments to its credit," "PRIs have not been given a chance to serve as a vanguard of development in village India," and "The PRIs have to be so designed that they can become effective channels of people's participation in growth — economic, social, and political."(12)

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The Asoka Mehta Committee emphasised the fundamental validity of the PRI and suggested a plan for efficient decentralisation to create the kind of structure, technical proficiency, and leadership that would be able to adequately reflect the dynamics of growth. The establishment of a two-tier Panchayati Raj system was the Asoka Mehta Committee's most significant recommendation (13).

At the meeting of the Chief Ministers in May 1979, the Asoka Mehta Committee's suggestions were taken into consideration. The necessity for further decentralisation was generally acknowledged, but there were disagreements on the ideal structural arrangement.

73rd Amendment and After: New Panchayati Raj System

In an effort to revive the Panchayati Raj, the governments of Rajiv Gandhi and V.P. Singh both submitted constitutional amendment bills in Parliament in 1989 and 1990, respectively. Both legislation, however, were unable to be enacted because the Lok Sabha was dissolved. In order to enhance the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the nation, the P.V. Narasimha Rao Government proposed the 72nd Constitutional Amendment Bill in Parliament in September 1991 (14). The Bill was approved by the Parliament as the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, and after receiving approval from the state legislatures and the President of India, it was published in the official gazette on April 20, 1993. The Panchayati Raj Institutions now have constitutional validity after notification.

The federal democratic system of the nation entered a new phase with the enactment of the Constitution Act, 1992, which also gave the Panchayati Raj Institutions constitutional legitimacy (15). The Panchayati Raj Institutions at the village, intermediate, and district levels have been formalised by the Act as the third tier of government. The goal was to integrate social justice with decentralisation, with a focus on providing accommodations for underprivileged groups of people in Panchayatis, especially in leadership roles. With the establishment of political empowerment via a system of regular elections to the three levels of Panchayatis in all States.

PRIS' IMPORTANCE AND ROLE IN EMPOWERING WOMEN

Panchayati Raj Institutions have long been seen as a tool for effective local government. They provide an excellent illustration of democratic decentralisation. Giving women in Panchayatis representation results in the empowerment of women. Since the Panchayati is the local level of government, it may help develop female leaders. It offers them chances to boost their confidence and get practical experience (16). They are able to actively take part in the decision-making

process throughout the development phase. Politics is seeing an increase in female participation. Women's concerns are thus being highlighted at the municipal level, followed by the state level and finally the federal level. Women in panchayatis are bringing attention to concerns of gender injustice, poverty, and inequality in the state. By addressing problems like water supply, education, health, alcohol, abuse, sanitation, and violence against women, they are altering government. Due to their active and ongoing engagement, women are becoming more intelligent and informed. They participate actively in debates and training sessions. Participation in Panchayatis symbolises societal gender equality. One key factor in women's empowerment is their involvement in policymaking (17).

CONCLUSION

This study offers a thorough understanding of panchayat raj institutions, how women are represented within them, and what needs to be done to ensure that women are fully represented. For instance, a rigorous training programme is needed to ensure that female sarpanches are aware of their rights and obligations.

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