



Women Empowerment through Participation in Panchayati raj institutions

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Abstract

Women represent almost half population of country. The constitution of India has given equal voting power to man and women to establish gender equality in democracy. But even after the so many years of democracy in country, Indian politics does not have much participation of women in political parties. This paper aims to explain the importance of women role in political participation in India with special reference to Panchayati Raj. This paper explores the existing literature on women participation in Panchayati Raj from various reports, news, articles, and research paper. Funding of this paper highlights the role of political participation in empowered in terms of gender equality, social welfare, rural development and overall development of women capabilities in decision making.

Keywords: women empowerment, population, panchayati raj institutions

Introduction

India is the second most populous nations in the world and falls slightly behind China. As per the census statistics, 2018 India occupies 2.4% of the world's land area but over 17.74% of the world's population lives in India and ranked number 2 on the basis of population. Total population of India is approximately 1,348,783,485 out of which 48.36% are females and 51.64 are males. Indian society is male dominated where majority of decisions are taken by male. In such type of environment, it is very difficult for a woman to think about to go in politics.

On the one hand, India falls in the lowest quartile with respect to the number of women in parliament (9.1%). Even the UAE, with 22.5%, has more women representatives, according to the UN's 2008 survey of women in politics. That said, the recently concluded 15th Lok Sabha elections have delivered a record 59 women as members of Parliament, the highest since independence, raising their parliamentary participation to 10.9%. Seventeen of these women are under 40. Women's involvement in political parties is tied to the increasing demand for equal rights.

For the growth of a country, it becomes necessary that there should be equal participation of women in grassroots level of politics. In India, where majority of population lives in villages, panchayat system acts as the basis unit of politics. Gandhi had aptly favoured the panchayati raj and his dream got translated with the passage of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 (or simply the Panchayati Raj Act), which introduced the three-tier Panchayati Raj system to ensure people's participation in rural reconstruction in general and that of women in particular. It came into force with effect from April 24, 1993. A panchayat is a five-person elected village council. Representation of women leaders at the grassroots level in India is nearly 50%, especially since the passing of the 73rd amendment in 1992, which allotted one-third of all seats to women. Several states, including Madhya

Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar and most recently, Uttarakhand, have allotted not just the required 33% of panchayat seats for women but increased it to 50%. Through this study, authors tried to investigate the role of women in panchayat raj system.

Review of Literature

Vyasulu & Vyasulu (1999) ^[13] highlighted that due to the presence of strict social restrictions on the mobility of women, women who mix around openly with their male counterparts in political meetings are looked down upon as women of dubious character. Sometimes it also so happens that a number of villages come under one Gram Panchayat, in such cases representation and participation of women become difficult as women have much less mobility than men. Alsop *et al.* (2001) ^[2] found that in many villages that the daughter-in-laws (bahu) of the house who generally belong to a different village are hardly allowed to have social intercourse with men of her husband's village. Another very important factor for the election of women is also age. The elder women have a more liberated position in the village and can therefore freely intermingle socially with men. Hence they are the preferred candidates to enter Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). However, as instances from villages in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh show, it is the young women who are educated and hence could fare better if given a chance to enter the PRIs.

Ambedkar (2000) ^[1] showed that larger size of participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institution could take place because of reservation of seats for the women candidates. Nambiar (2001) ^[6] in her study of 'Making the Gram Sabha Work' noted the difference utilities in organizing the Gram Sabha. Majority of women reported that they were not informed or invited to the meetings. However, they have to forego their day's wages or household duties just to identify beneficiaries as to convey what the gram Panchayat would do in future.

Pai (1998) ^[5] according to his field notes in Meerut District

‘Pradhanis in New Panchayats’ revealed that many of the Pradhanis were illiterate and only able to put their signatures on official papers. Regarding their roles, the study revealed that they were almost insignificant in the functioning of Gram and Block Panchayat bodies. As they belonged to better off families in the villages, they do not work outside their homes. They agreed to stand for elections due to family pressure and also the decision of their community and not because they were keen to do so. The reservations provided by the Government had forced them to contest elections; provision of reservation has not led them to participate in decision-making in local bodies.

Baviskar (2005) argued that women have now come to value their newfound freedom to move out of the four walls of the house and are finding a space for themselves in the public realm. Ravi *et al.* (2004) ^[10] highlighted that in Madhya Pradesh, Kamataka and Andhra Pradesh list the cases of various women who used their position in the PRIs to engage in developmental work in their respective localities and bring in positive changes. Bringing forth the positive implications of affirmative action in case of tribal women, Chauhan (2003) argued that owing to their election to the PRIs and their becoming a part of village self-governance, there is a positive change that has come about in the image and status of tribal women and the women feel that their respect in the eyes of their family and community has increased. Thus it is observed that participation in the affairs of the PRIs have enabled elected women representatives to have a better understanding of the workings of subnational politics. Vidya (1997) ^[12] stated that reservation got the women into the PRIs as elected officials, they soon realized that "women members have to prove that they can work equally well as male members. Ridge (2010) highlighted that West Bengal villages reveal that women in the villages where the PRIs are headed by a female sarpanch have recorded a rise from 7 percent to 10 percent in women's participation in Panchayat meetings.

Buch (2000) ^[3] gives an understanding and estimation of this change in attitude in women elected representatives of the PRIs.

Table 1: Change in Attitudes and Practices Percentage of Women Representatives in PRIs

Nature of change reported/perceived by women representatives	
Positive Change	
a) In attitude	48.4
b) In Practice	58.6
Change in	
a) Children's education	27.3
b) Children's Marriage Age	10.2
c) Dowry	8.3
d)Others	12.8
Not observing Ghughat (wearing a veil) after coming to Panchayat although observing earlier	7.4

Source: (Buch 2000) ^[3].

The above table clearly brings forth that there has been a positive change in attitude in more than 48 percent women due to their participation and representation in PRIs. Maximum change in attitude was seen in terms of children's

education. This is an indication of the fact that women who are now participating in the village governance are becoming more aware of the importance of education and want their children to reap the benefits of good education. It is also evident from this table that women also have displayed a positive change in regards to the prevalent appalling social practices like dowry. Since women play a very significant role in rituals associated with marriage, a stance taken by women members of the PRIs against dowry practices will have deep impact in the functioning of such societal norms.

Thus, women are also actively taking participation in political activities of villages and presenting themselves as a distinct personality in the society.

Significance of women participation in Panchayati raj system

Freedom of Speech and Expression

Because of participation in panchayati raj system women were not found meek or mute, they usually raised their point and view in the Panchayat meetings. now, women can also express their views, raise their voice against any injustice.

Internal Development

Active and continued participation of women in the functioning of panchayati raj institutions tends to generate awareness, overcome their inability and develop in them self reliance and confidence and provide them exposure to wider society. In a sense, women pass through the whole process of personality development.

Women empowerment

Now more younger and educated women are entering into panchayats, attending panchayati raj training and active in discussions. Further, women members now express their views more freely and on more numbers of issues accept views of their malefolk less blindly and shoulder greater responsibilities. Greater participation and greater efficiency in conducting panchayat meetings on the part of women members are also endorsed by considerable proportion of male members.

Gender equality

Women participation in Panchayati Raj also represents gender equality in society. The feudal thinking in our society is a big problem for our society as well as in the path of women representatives of the PRIs. Most of the people of our society have a negative opinion about the women’s leadership capacity. When women get equal power of decision making then only women welfare is ensured in society.

Rural development

Women are actively participating in rural development as per their capacity right from laborers to policy- makers. Rural development could not possible in absence of women participation. Women had great role in rural welfare, improvement of women education and health and public utility services rural area.

Conclusion

Women participation in policies is one of the important

sources of women empowerment. Because the village Panchayat level can strongly raise in the issues related to the betterment of women, can play dominant role in decision making process and make suitable recommendation for improving the status of women in the meeting. Its creates opportunities for women to exercise more control over design and provisions of services and the management of resources it may benefit to society and whole country.

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