



PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Various studies have been conducted on the issues of Panchayati raj in many Indian states, including Uttar Pradesh, and have uncovered many important aspects that have given meaning and power to grass-root democracy. However, the panchayati raj system in Meerut District, Uttar Pradesh, and India is unable to realize Mahatma Gandhi's fundamental goals and dreams. Women's role and engagement in grassroots democracy has improved since reservation. Women, on the other hand, are either playing their role or have done their role clearly. Scholars and academics have not given enough consideration to the question of party-level elections at grass-roots democracy, despite the fact that political parties have played a significant role in state and national politics for years. In addition, various types of political party assistance for underprivileged elements of society, such as schedule castes and schedule tribes, may have a role in greater political engagement of such groups. They may not be allowed to participate in national politics if party line elections are not held. Political parties may give tanning, funding, and protection against money power in panchayati raj institutions, as well as criminalization of politics. For academics, adequate financial support for panchayati raj members is a significant topic because they have been disregarded for many years. It is impressive that they do difficult missions with little money. Patriarchy is a sociocultural phenomenon that prevents women from participating actively in panchayats. It has been shown that guys have a hard time letting go of their macho dominant mentality. In reality, many women in panchayats acknowledge to agreeing to run for election or even nomination when males beg them to. Because males perform panchayat tasks on their behalf, such women do not attend panchayat meetings. Papers are sent home with them whenever their signature is necessary. Men pay little attention or respect to women who attend panchayat sessions. Women find it difficult to respond to an emergency that occurs late at night. Many families oppose to their going out throughout the day to settle the villagers' quarrel. They are also barred from attending meetings held in distant locations.

KEY WORDS: Women, Empowerment, Panchayati Raj, Institution, Grassroots.



INTRODUCTION

CONCEPT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Inequality in male-female relationships is a global phenomena, but the extent of it varies by civilization. Men and women are valued differently in various countries, and these differences influence societal ideas, attitudes, and values. As a result, women are categorized as a social group rather than a biological group (Sassen, 2002, p. 376). As a result, in the social division of labor, women's duties, rights, and obligations must be recognized alongside men's. Furthermore, these sex-based duties, privileges, and responsibilities are not only distinct, but also unequal. Women's roles are subjugated to men's duties in practically every domain of human functioning; women's rights are fewer and less emancipating than men's; and women's obligations are more restricting than men's. Men have culturally and often legally sanctioned authority over women, implying that males not only have and can exert greater power than women in practically all sectors of life. The notion of women's empowerment takes on new significance in this situation.

In the development literature, particularly in the context of women, empowerment of marginalized groups has become a catchphrase. Politicians and bureaucrats use it in their speeches, academics discuss it in books, journals, and erudite pieces, and journalists freely utilize it in editorials and commentary. It was a common phrase at United Nations Women's Conferences, particularly in Beijing (China) in 1995, Cairo (Georgia) in 1994, and Nairobi (Nigeria) in 1985, which urged participating countries to take steps to increase women's political participation by reserving 35 percent of seats in all elections. The notion has been difficult to define due to its widespread and popular application. As a result, an effort must be taken to define it in order to conduct an empirical study.

It is vital to define power since it is the foundation of the notion of 'empowerment.' Max Weber, who had the greatest impact on the study of power, accorded it a wide relevance in every major social sector, is the finest person to understand it. "In general, we interpret by 'power' the opportunity of a man or a group of men to realize their own will in a social activity even in the face of resistance from those who are participating in the action," Weber writes (Weber, 1978, p. 926).



MEANING AND DEFINITION OF EMPOWERMENT:

Panchayati raj institutions at the grassroots level have long existed in the South Asian political system, particularly in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. It is the oldest system of grass-roots administration on the Indian subcontinent. The term "Panchayat" refers to a "Assembly" of five "Panch" who are wise and respected elders who are elected and recognized by local communities. Those gatherings were used to settle disputes between people and villages. The Indian constitution delegated several administrative tasks to the local level in order to strengthen elected PRIs. There are distinct differences between Gram Panchayat and "Khap panchayat," which is also known as caste panchayat and may be found throughout the country. The act of endowing someone with power and authority. As a result, women's empowerment refers to giving authority to women who would otherwise be powerless. This involves providing women with effective decision-making power and the ability to influence other decisions, as well as economic, social, and civil liberties. By definition, empowerment entails a boost in one's ability to wield power. Women in India, as in other undeveloped nations, are seen to be inferior to males and are treated as such. Furthermore, because women and men live in a matrix of unequal gender relations, a reduction in gender inequality is required for women to achieve 'empowerment.' Changes such as increasing income, skills, and self-confidence, in other words, may be better seen as enablers for women's empowerment. However, in order to be sufficiently empowered to reach their imagined goal, women must first have control at home, which they frequently lack.

HISTORY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

Indian independence must begin at the grassroots level, with each village becoming a Republic with its own Panchayat. Mahatma Gandhi Ji In our nation, we have established a democratic system in which all those who are impacted by a decision should have the right to participate in the decision-making process, either directly or through elected representatives. It entails more than just conducting elections, having parliamentary discussions, and passing legislation. It encompasses a considerably broader range of issues; therefore, the true test of democracy is how inclusive it is. The level to which individuals have developed is assessed in terms of the number of people who have access to and equity in enjoying the advantages of democracy. The welfare and care of every single member of society, particularly the disadvantaged, marginalized, and excluded, must be considered. Government developed local self-government institutions to prevent our system from devolving towards democracy and to ensure economic and social equity for all sections of the population (as panchayati raj institutions: the lowest tier of local government



unit in India). Because it is just a democracy for the sake of the word if the power structure does not represent people's goals, is sensitive to them, and is responsive in terms of fostering welfare and empowerment of people. We've created the notion of panchayati Raj to make it a reality. Panchayati raj institutions at the grass-roots level have been operating for a long time in the Indian political system and the South Asian political system, particularly in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. It is the oldest system of grass-roots administration on the Indian subcontinent. The term "Panchayat" refers to a "Assembly" of five "Panch" who are wise and respected elders who are elected and recognized by local communities. Those gatherings were used to settle disputes between people and villages. The Indian constitution delegated several administrative tasks to the local level in order to strengthen elected PRIs. Gram Panchayat differs from "Khap Panchayat," which is also known as caste panchayat and can be found in many parts of the nation.

PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Because it is at the forefront of successful implementation of Panchayati Raj Institutions, West Bengal has been chosen to examine the empowerment of women representatives in panchayats. It has been implementing Panchayati Raj Institutions by conducting elections to all three levels every five years since 1978. The panchayat (at various levels) has also been given a wide variety of tasks that were previously thought to be the domain of the district bureaucracy. Before the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act 1993 was approved, the West Bengal government made efforts to ensure that one-third of seats in panchayat bodies were reserved for women. Women were given one-third of the total seats in panchayat bodies by the West Bengal Panchayat (Amendment) Act 1992. West Bengal is unique in the implementation of Panchayati Raj Institutions, according to Prabhat Datta, for three reasons. For starters, it was the first state in the country to implement a one-third seat reservation for women. Second, land reforms produced the objective circumstances for effective and actual participation, as a consequence of which, unlike the rest of the nation, West Bengal made history by allowing tiny marginal and landless farmers to be elected to panchayat councils. Panchayats in West Bengal are free of the landed gentry's grip and upper caste supremacy, allowing impoverished people such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and women to participate freely and fairly. Third, West Bengal was the first state in the country to elect more women than were required by law. In the 1993 Gram Panchayat elections, around 35% of women were elected. West Bengal is also unusual in that it was the first state in India to undertake panchayat elections on a party basis in 1978. Although there was strong resistance to political parties participating in municipal elections, the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) and its supporters favoured the formal

recognition of political parties in panchayat elections. They felt that involving political parties directly in Panchayat Institutions would make the leadership more disciplined and accountable in managing these rural democratic institutions, and would put an end to landed gentry and upper caste dominance.

Because of the specific characteristics of West Bengal's Panchayati Raj institutions, it was necessary to limit this research on women's empowerment in panchayats to the state. In West Bengal, there is limited research on women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Women have been elected to panchayats in West Bengal since 1978, according to Kanango (1996), although their number is relatively small. According to the West Bengal Panchayat (Amendment) Act 1992, women must make up at least one-third of the heads of the three levels, including women from reserved castes and tribes. This has resulted in a huge rise in women's participation at all three levels of West Bengal's Panchayati Raj. Political parties do not require all women to be official members. Women are elected to panchayats in two categories: those who come from households where women of a previous generation, such as mothers or grandparents, were pre-independence activists, and those who are activists themselves. Because they have been exposed to political action in their own families or have been a part of the panchayat setup, these women freely get into the conflict. These women get off to a good start and are aware about the positive role they can play as women in the system. Those who are nominated only because they are linked to sitting male members of local panchayats fall into the second group. As a result, several political parties identify female relatives of male members and propose them for election.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research study that is being proposed is a case study. The analysis is based on historical and comparative approach, while the research is based on empirical and observational methods. Interview schedules are used to gather primary data. The secondary data is only utilized when it is absolutely necessary. For primary data collection, simple random sampling and others were utilized, with a sample size of 20.32 percent. Citations are made using the Chicago manual and other sources. The usage of statistical techniques and information technology is dependent on the situation. Historical as well as empirical methodologies were used in the production of the thesis.

A detailed interview schedule was devised in order to obtain information regarding women's participation in PRIs. The women representatives were interviewed to learn about their motivations for entering politics, their engagement, their role in decision-making, and the challenges they confront as Gram PRI



representatives. In addition to the interviews and conversations, the workings of women representatives in PRIs and their constituencies were observed. This was accomplished by personally attending PRI meetings and visiting the workplaces and houses of the women members of the PRIs. While the interview schedule for elected women representatives may be considered the primary method for obtaining their replies to the study's numerous topics, In addition to these procedures, all pertinent recorded data for the study was gathered. All PRIs-related data that the government had supplied to the PRIs was utilised.

DATA GENERATION AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES:

Because of time and financial constraints, the researcher was unable to contact all representatives of district PRIs and other respondents and acquire data from them. As a result, a sample of 36 Gram Panchayats, 36 Gram Sabhas, 48 Kshetra Panchayats, and 10 Zila Panchayat Wards was drawn using basic random sampling and various sampling techniques. Where women are elected as legislators. A total of 274 PRIs were chosen for an interview. A researcher contacts members of these panchayats in order to collect data from the field. The researcher devised a four-interview schedule, one for PRIs, to acquire primary data from the above respondents. Books, journals, publications, and internet sources were employed as secondary sources of information for this study. Aside from the Central University of Haryana Library, the researcher visited libraries such as the Delhi University Library, the Allahabad University Library, the B.H.U. Library, the Lucknow University Library, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj Library, the PRIA organization Library, and the CSDS Institute Library for secondary information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PRIS:-

Women's involvement in PRIs and their empowerment are inextricably linked. Women may play a crucial role in panchayati raj by participating in these institutions for the welfare of all sections of women and society in political, social, economic, and cultural contexts; in other words, participation is a precondition for the growth of any state and civilization. 7 Women may offer their experiences and valuable values and learning through participating in panchayati raj and other political institutions. Because empowered women would not be a long time, participation in municipal bodies will be a milestone to inter in state legislatures and parliaments in India. Women's empowerment would gain meaning and force if they were included in decision-making processes at both the state and federal levels. Women who are empowered will be more concerned with the concepts of democracy, equality, liberty, human rights, and social

justice. As a result, several organizations would be established for the development of their society. Women's empowerment may be improved through women's engagement in India's civil society movement, which is now in a very weak state. Women were not allowed to participate in PRIs until the 73rd amendment, but they can now play a vital role.

They can attend Gram sabha, Gram panchayat, and zila panchayat meetings and propose proposals, discuss them equally with men, and vote on them according to their preferences.

Many state and centrally supported schemes are currently operating at the PRIs level, with women playing an important part in their implementation and social audit.

To understand the nature of women's involvement, we need to know their level of active engagement in various PRI institutions, their opinions on various issues, gender discrimination, male dominance, representative satisfaction, raising questions in meetings, and so on. We can construct a picture of women's participation in PRIs after examining that sort of inquiry.

TABLE NO.1

TABLE SHOWING FEATURES OF REPRESENTATION IN PRIS MEETING

Features of participation	Number	Percentage
All times	29	11.6
often	150	60
Less often	32	12.8
never	39	15.6
Total	250	100

Table and figure No.-1 show that 11.6 percent of respondents said they attend PRIs meetings on a regular basis and raise a variety of concerns, whereas 60 percent said they attend PRIs meetings frequently, 12.8 % less frequently, and 15.6 percent never attend PRIs meetings. Following the examination of the table, it can be concluded that over 90% of respondents engage in the PRIs process. Although it is the greatest approach for PRIs, only 14.23% of people participate at all times.

TABLE NO. 2

TABLE & FIGURE SHOWING CONNECTION OF REPRESENTATIVE IN CIVIL ORGANIZATION

Member in civil organization	Number	Percentage
Mahila Shakti	20	8
Self help Group	45	18
Social reform Dal	50	20
Cannot say	135	54
Total	250	100

Table and figure No.-2 shows that 8 percent of the representatives are affiliated with "Mahila Shakti," while 18 percent are affiliated with "self-help groups," 20 percent with "social reform Dal," and 54 percent do not have an opinion on the subject. It is obvious that the civil society movement is in poor shape.

TABLE NO. 3

TABLE SHOWING THE FEATURE OF RESPONDENTS PARTICIPATED IN PRIS

Feature of participation in meeting	Number	Percentage
Actively	30	12
Less Actively	115	46
Passively	85	34
Less passively	20	8
Total	250	100

The involvement of respondents in PRIs is depicted in table-3. In which 12 percent of respondents participated actively and frequently raised the issue, 46 percent of respondents participated less actively and moderately discussed the issue, 34 percent of respondents responded passively, and 8 percent of respondents did not participate at all in the PRIs meeting.

TABLE NO. 4

TABLE SHOWING TERMS OF PARTICIPATION BY REPRESENTATIVES TO THEIR PANCHAYATS

Participation to Panchayat	Number	Percent
All the times	80	32
Often	95	38
Less often	69	27.6
Never	06	2.4
Total	250	100

Table and figure No. 4 demonstrate that 32 % of representatives to their panchayats attended PRIs meetings on a regular basis, 38 percent attended PRIs meetings frequently, 27.6 percent attended PRIs meetings less frequently, and 2.4 percent never attended PRIs meetings. On the one hand, it is obvious that a high number of women representatives attend PRIs meetings; on the other hand, a small number of women representatives do not attend PRIs meetings. Women's representatives participating in meetings are a wonderful idea for PRIs. However, some female delegates are not actively involved in PRI meetings.

CONCLUSION

Man leaders and elected members must play an active role in encouraging women to participate more actively in decision-making at all levels of society, including the Gram Sabha and Panchayat. Men and women working together can contribute to the complete development of society and the country. In India, 50% of women's resources are not exploited prior to PRIs. Following the implementation of PRIs, all available resources, including men and women, are being used to make the democratic system more successful and fruitful. This is vital for mobilising resources for the country's socioeconomic, cultural, educational, and medical sectors to progress and develop.

As a result, the primary goal of this study was to determine the extent of women's empowerment in the Meerut District of Uttar Pradesh following the 73rd constitutional amendment act of 1992. Prior to the adoption of the panchayati raj act, 1992, the degree of political, social, economic, and cultural knowledge of women, as well as their participation, was extremely low in Meerut District. Women's social, economic, cultural, and political standing increased after the 73rd constitutional amendment act was passed, with one-third of total seats allotted for women. As a result, it may be argued that reservation in panchayati institutions has improved the role of women in the family and in rural society, and that it should be extended to national politics so that women might achieve widespread political empowerment.

Another important element to consider in this context is proper and relevant training, as well as area culture and language. There is no clear image of women's roles here. Only a few studies in this subject have taken the people's voice into consideration while evaluating the performance of women members. The public's viewpoint on this subject has not been addressed. In light of this, it has been decided that, after twenty years of reserve implementation, it is time to assess how women members operate in rural regions; if they are adequately cared for and encouraged to serve the people; and whether the reservation ideology has been established or not. Given that the Act was implemented about two decades ago, it is now a suitable moment to learn about the decision-making level of women members in gram panchayats.

SUGGESTIONS

- ❖ Women at the grass-roots level must be encouraged to enter politics and use their minds, brains, and know-how for the greater good of society and the people.
- ❖ Meetings should be held on a regular and timely basis in a nice and open environment. Meetings should not be held during the planting and harvesting of crops. Gram Sabha meetings should be held at least once every three months. The meeting's decisions should be conveyed to higher officers, such as the Block Development Officer and the Panchayat Officer. Members of Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha may play a significant role in PRIs meetings if they receive appropriate financial support and culturally focused instruction. Gram Panchayat would properly fulfil their job if Gram Sabha becomes powerful. Gram Sabha, on the other hand, is a watershed moment in the panchayati raj system. Gram Sabha empowerment is an unavoidable requirement for the development of PRIs. Gram Sabhas and other administrative authorities, on the other hand, should adequately oversee Gram Panchayat functions to ensure that they are carried out properly. Gram Panchayat should hold them accountable.

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