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# Social and Inclusive Democracy through the Improvement of Women and Weaker Sections

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## ABSTRACT

*Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India is a homogenous effort for capacity building of rural people to promote greater participation of them in their own governance. The state government is also empowered to make laws providing criteria for disqualification of candidature from panchayat elections and also to legislate with respect to maintenance of accounts by the panchayats and their audit. Today, in this political lifestyle the competent person is always left behind whereas the incompetent person leads the front. It is indeed the irony that we live in this democratic country but we tend to live in an undemocratic society whereby the social justice becomes a distant dream. The Panchayati Raj system has to fulfil its aim for what it comes for and for this we indeed require the support because as soon as the conflict between parties comes to existence we start losing the track.*

**Keywords:** Democracy, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Politics, Reservation, Women.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has given a new dimension to the process of rural development in India by providing reservation for SCs, STs and women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). It has created a salient resolution in the country. The present study examines the impact of such resolution on actual functioning of PRIs. Panchayats have been the backbone of Indian villages since the beginning of recorded history<sup>2</sup>. They exist in the ancient India and functioned as an effective instrument of people organization at grass-root level. Even immediately before independence some states enacted their panchayat act and constituted the gram panchayat at village level. Prior to that, colonial masters had made provision for district board and local bodies as the unit of local self government for governance of country (Mishra, 1996). During the last six decade or so, the transformation of rural areas has been considered to be important objective of development planning in India<sup>3</sup>. The number of policies and programmes has been introduced to build capacity of rural masses and raise the living standards. Decentralization of planning and administration is the accepted tool to achieve these objectives.

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from <[www.civildaily.com](http://www.civildaily.com)> accessed on 15.02.2018 at 08:30 p.m.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Panchayati raj institutions under decentralized planning offer citizens living in rural areas a practical opportunity to participate in decision making and planning process, to engage with various development schemes being implemented by government and interact with their elected representatives directly to ensure that their interests are effectively served and their money properly spent. Gandhi ji, the father of nation, in 1946 had aptly remarked that the Indian independence must begin at the bottom and every village out be a republic and panchayats having powers.

## **II. WOMEN RESERVATION BILL**

Post Gandhi, India experienced centralization of planning which resulted in higher inequality in political decision making at the various levels. While Government was deeply concerned of issues of gender equality, women were not always a part of such decision making. Although, India has seen women participating in politics as the longest serving Prime minister, as chief ministers of various states, members in national parliament and state legislative assemblies in large numbers, yet the occurrence of such events has not been commensurate to their population. In order to enable better women participation in active politics, authorities had been trying to put in reservation for women but have not been successful in true terms due to non-support from some of the regional parties. Back in history, one of the prominent member of freedom struggle, Sarojini Naidu rejected reservation for women, citing that women are not weak, timid, meek<sup>4</sup>. She claimed that the demand for granting preferential treatment to women is an admission on her part of her inferiority and there has been no need for such a thing in India as the women have always been by the side of men. The issue of women's reservation again came to limelight in 1973 with voices recommending reservation for women in at least one third of the seats and eventually statutory women's panchayats at the village level were recommended to take care of the neglect of women in rural development programs through 73rd & 74th constitutional amendments in 1993.

## **III. PANCHAYATI RAJ REFORMS**

Indian Constitution made provisions relating to the establishment, powers, and responsibilities of the panchayats through the 73rd Amendment in 1993 with three tier system, viz, panchayats (village governance bodies) at the village, intermediate and district levels in every state, except provision of skipping intermediate level in states with less than twenty lakh population. The states have been empowered through law for the composition of panchayats. The reform

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<sup>4</sup> Vidya Subrahmaniam, Politics of Women's Reservation Bill, *The Hindu*, 20<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2010.

provided for reservation of both seats and leadership positions for the Scheduled Castes, tribes, and women. A normal duration of five years for panchayats has been provided with the authority of preparing the electoral rolls and conducting elections in the state Election Commission. The state government is also empowered to make laws providing criteria for disqualification of candidature from panchayat elections and also to legislate with respect to maintenance of accounts by the panchayats and their audit. Apart from providing political empowerment, the Panchayati Raj reforms endow the panchayats with necessary powers and authority to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon panchayats at the appropriate level for economic development and social justice under their jurisdiction. This has helped all the sections of the society particularly the weaker sections including women to take part and to share the responsibility of governance and development at least at the sub-district levels. As the legislation provides for reservation for women, the number of women elected representative at local level has sharply increased<sup>5</sup>. India has been maintaining the record of number of women representatives at the panchayat level and statistics indicate that 30-50% of local level elected representatives are women. With the 73rd and 74th amendments of the Indian Constitution, a third tier of governance was created. It has helped in providing new opportunities for local level planning, effective implementation and monitoring of various social and economic development programs in the country.

#### **IV. SOCIAL INCLUSIVENESS IN DEMOCRACY**

The basic purpose of the Indian Constitution was to uplift the marginalized community. The constitution indeed works for that and realise fundamental rights to empower the people which would ensure economic and social democracy. The work for the benefit of the people should be at first hand and it is essential to have community of purpose, desire for welfare, loyalty to public ends and morality of co-operation as roots of democracy and in this democracy the incoming of the 73 rd constitutional amendment has indeed worked a lot. Through this intense effort has been made to guarantee equality to the disadvantaged sections of the population through constitutional provisions aimed at preventing discrimination and promoting social justice. The concept of micromanagement and bringing good governance was the primary aim and moreover bringing it to the remotest corner was the biggest challenge in this country. The concern of social justice implied the absence of discrimination on the ground of caste, race, religion, sex etc. in present scenario. This all perspective somehow or the other meant for giving equal opportunity to each and every person in every sphere to develop their total personality

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<sup>5</sup> Anant Mishra, Transforming Roots of India: Revaluating Panchayati Raj System, retrieved from <[www.newdelhitimes.com](http://www.newdelhitimes.com)> accessed on 20.02.2018 at 10:25 am

which also should work for removing the imbalance of society in socio-economic and political life. Today, in this political lifestyle the competent person is always left behind whereas the incompetent person leads the front. It is indeed the irony that we live in this democratic country but we tend to live in an undemocratic society whereby the social justice becomes a distant dream. The Panchayati Raj system has to fulfil its aim for what it comes for and for this we indeed require the support because as soon as the conflict between parties comes to existence we start losing the track<sup>6</sup>. This research paper tries to check out the challenges in effectively implementing the constitutional provisions.

## **V. PUBLIC ENDS**

Empowerment is the enhancement of the political, social, economic or spiritual strength of individuals and communities. Empowerment envelops developing and building capacities of individuals, communities to make them part of the main stream society. Education is the means by which societies have been known in history, to grow out of oppression to democratic participation and involvement. It is a powerful tool for empowerment of individual. It is intrinsic to human personality. It carries both intrinsic as well as instrumental values. This empowerment should be there for all. Speaking precisely, the marginalized community has been the most affected in the whole process. It's not that the government has not done anything but what can be the very base is the fact that the implementation at the very ground level is very poor. Today, the incoming of panchayati raj system has somehow given various kinds of opportunities to the marginalized community. But still they are affected by the vicious circle of the society.

The idea of empowerment in its current usage is new, yet it is frequently used in recent discourses on development. It may be invoked in virtually any context: in speaking about human rights, about basic needs, about economic security, about capacity building, about skill formation or about the conditions of a dignified social existence. This idea is also used in the context of the upliftment of the marginalized, unorganized and other disadvantaged sections of society. After all, oppressed groups such as unorganized workers, poor peasants, tribal people, dalits and women are all engaged in a struggle for power and judge the development process for their own experiences. Thus empowerment represents the hopes and dreams of the marginalized groups for a social environment free of inequalities disfavouring them in different spheres of life. The deprived people and their organisations at grassroots level are striving relentlessly to realize their dreams and hopes for a better future and empowered life. This study seeks to relate the dynamism of organizations for women and weaker sections with the

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

empowerment of the mentioned marginalized sections and develop a theoretical framework to analyse their dialectical interaction.

## **VI. WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS AND PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS**

Political system and decision making process is seen clearly in the changes incorporated in the Panchayati Raj Institution. The objective of bringing improvement in the socioeconomic condition of women could be successful only by taking suitable initiatives and measures for empowering them. Empowerment of women will not be possible unless they are provided proper representation in the political system. This objective should be achieved at desired level through making the provision of linking and associating maximum number of women in political affairs even at the lowest level of political activity. In recently introduced Panchayati Raj Institution, the policy for reservation in favour of women has therefore, been thought as an important approach to maximize their participation in the local level. Political system and decision making process in the activities of rural area<sup>7</sup>. Under the 73rd amendment of constitution of Panchayati Raj Institution, one third of the total seats for scheduled caste, backward class, scheduled tribes and general caste women members in Grampradhan of village Panchayat, Block Panchayat, District Panchayat are reserved for women candidate. Conceptually, providing representation to women in Panchayati Raj Institution could be accepted as an important planning approach regarding minimizing the traditional felling of people about the status of women in our society, particularly in terms of keeping women under the subjugation of men, imposing restrictions by the households and society against them in the availment of certain opportunities and several other social, cultural and traditional binding disfavoring them for improving personal life style and status in existing social and economic setting. Consequently this newly introduced policy would enhance the possibilities of increasing equalities in the process of socio-economic development, participation in different activities in mutual understandings, status and role to play in the house hold and the activities performed outside households and different decision making processes of the family among men and women. This would also develop the understanding of women regarding their duties and right about national welfare and its integrity and they will be able to contribute effectively along with their male counterparts. A general perception in societies around the world is that women's major role is to cook food, take care of the children and the household. Different societies have different social norms and values. In some societies both men and women are assigned specific roles and duties. In most of developing countries, only the reproductive role of women is

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<sup>7</sup> Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

recognized. Under such circumstances, it is not possible for women to participate in the public sphere of life. Cultural factors therefore offer constraint to women participation in politics. Institutional factors may also impact women's political participation. Electoral system with more seats per district and proportional formula for allocating seats can enhance women's participation (Darcy et al., 1994). Quota system is another important institutional device that can guarantee a minimum number of women seats-holders in legislature.

It has to be considered that the inclusion of well qualified women in village Panchayat at the initial state of the interlocution of Panchayati Raj Institution in rural areas would be an important instrumental measure in planning for improving social status and empowering women. This group of women, if provided representation at village Panchayat level can strongly rise 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<sup>8</sup>. It creates opportunities for women to exercise more control over design and provisions of services and the management of resources it may benefit. Good number of women competing with men in local politics, forwarding gender related agendas is looked as a way towards gender equity.

## **VII. ROLE OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Panchayati Raj Department is an important department of Uttar Pradesh related to the rural development. The main objective of this department is to strengthen the Panchayati Raj System in the state according to the 73rd amendment of Indian constitution. So that panchayats can realize the dream of rural administration and rural development with complete coordination and transparency<sup>9</sup>. For this purpose the department has provided a Citizen Charter. For the sake of public convenience and knowledge, this charter has been divided into 7 subjects:-

1. Financial aid to Gram Panchayats.
2. Rural Cleanliness Programmes.
3. Responsibilities of the Panchayats(Transparency in work, rural administration & development).
4. Responsibilities of public towards Panchayat.
5. Decentralization Programme.
6. Control over the Gram Panchayats

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Anant Mishra, Transforming Roots of India: Revaluating Panchayati Raj System, retrieved from <[www.newdelhitimes.com](http://www.newdelhitimes.com)> accessed on 20.02.2018 at 10:25 am

### 7. Arrangement of Panchayat Help-line.

Citizen Charter is a continuous process which will change periodically according to the feelings, recommendations, experiences and reactions of the public.

## VIII. DECENTRALIZATION PROGRAMME

Under the programme of decentralization Gram Panchayats are given the following works<sup>10</sup>:

- a) For promoting education Gram Panchayats have to open primary and secondary schools.
- b) All the present and new Hand Pumps are the asset of Gram Panchayat. Gram Panchayat is responsible for the repair and maintenance of these Handpumps.
- c) Akhadas, Gyms, Sports Ground and Sports related works are being operated by the Gram Panchayat for youth welfare.
- d) Medical, Health, Family welfare and Mother & Child welfare centres are all under the control of Gram Panchayat.
- e) For women and child development different Anganwadi programmes and other welfare programmes are being carried on by the Gram Panchayats.
- f) Livestock department has been transferred to the Gram Panchayats under this they have to maintain 'Pashu Seva Kendra' and 'D' Category veterinary hospitals.
- g) Agriculture related all the village level programmes will be run by the Gram Panchayats.
- h) For the rural development 'Sampurna Gramin Rozgar Yojna' is being carried on by Gram Panchayat.
- i) Gram Panchayats have right to distribute all kinds of schoarships.

## IX. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The study concludes that there is no substantial impact of 73rd amendment act on marginal group and women. As per statutory requirements, now at least one third of total panches/sarpanches are SC/STs and women. But except few cases, their participation is limited to giving their thumb expression/signature on official documents. So participation alone is not enough but the participation has to be effective. Effectiveness will come only when there is awareness. There is need to build the capacity and capability of the elected representative so that they can play meaningful role in panchayats. Empowerment of marginalized is at the current agenda of international political and social reformers. According to them the

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<sup>10</sup> Retrieved from <[www.civildaily.com](http://www.civildaily.com)> accessed on 15.02.2018 at 08:30 p.m.



empowerment of marginalized is a key to inclusive democracy<sup>11</sup>. It is an established fact that government in state or centre provides mechanism to empower marginalized, because, this institution operates as an agent of politico, economic and social development at grassroots level in contemporary age. In this capacity, it empowers the marginalized, no need to mention that it is essential for positive social change. The goal of inclusive growth as envisaged by the government cannot be achieved without the effective participation of local people and the Panchayati Raj Institutions and these institutions should be considered as an integral part of the governance of the country.

Following suggestions can go a long way for better functioning of panchayati raj institutions.

**1.** Orientation cum training programmes for panchayat members especially for women should be encouraged. These programmes must be conducted near their villages so that economically poor people can also participate in these training programmes.

**2.** Gram sabha meetings should be regularly conducted and supervised by panchayat officials so that awareness among the villager about on-going activities of panchayat can be created.

**3.** The SC/STs women are found to be unaware about activities of panchayat. It should be the duty of panchayat officials to make panchayat leaders aware about various activities of panchayat.

**4.** The financial aid to panchayats should be regular. The villages should be classified into developed, developing and underdeveloped categories using some measurable criterion. Village classification will help to identify the villages which need more investment.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*