



## Women at panchayati raj: the starting of new era

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### ABSTRACT

Panchayati Raj is not a new occurrence at the country. Its instance in history goes back to more than a 1000 years. It has its ancestry in Ancient Indian Institutions when the villages were little republics governed by their own Panchayats. During this period, the women were able to join politics, but they didn't take interest at politics due to the patriarchal set up of the society. The British through their ruthless method of revenue collection and the introduction of zamindari land tenure system almost destroyed these ancient republics and as well the involvement of women in politics. The British compile a view that "Vote of Women" would be premature at the Indian Society and continued to enforce Purdah and prohibition against women's education. (Bhagat 2005). After Independence, despite having a constitution, which embodies lofty, ideals like equity and equality, social justice could not be achieved so far. Even when India had a woman Prime Minister for quite a number of years, the situation of women at large did not change for the better.

Women's partaking in politics remained quite insignificant in India even after 59 years of self-rule. (Nanda 2006)

KEY WORDS: Women, Panchayati Raj, constitution of India

### INTRODUCTION

Women constitute more or less than half of the population of any country. But their involvement in politics is insignificant compared to men. Many psychological, social and physical factors hold women back from active political involvement. This is true as far as the state and national level politics is concerned. A democratic country cannot progress if energies of its half population are concerned in the kitchen only. After attaining independence Indian constitution ensured gender equality through various provisions and regulations. It was presumed that these rights would automatically get translated into political development of the women in the country. The issue of women's partaking in politics cannot be viewed in isolation from the general position of women in a society but despite their vast strength, women occupy a marginalized position in the political system.

The women political status implies a degree of equality and the freedom which is enjoyed by the women and the power and importance sharing given by the society in the political system. The impartiality and vigorous political partaking are indissoluble. Partaking of women in political arena is vital to the progression of women. Their political partaking means not only using the right to vote, but also power-sharing, co-decision-making, and co-policy-making at all levels of governance of the State. Women's equal status in every sphere is inextricably linked to country's progress and development. Political partaking of women in India has been neglected even since independence. Though our country has adopted democratic system of government and the women constitute 48.9 per cent of population of the country, but

their political partaking is very low. Due to various constraints they could not occupy the positions of power and assume leadership roles. Women's partaking has been increasing rapidly but it is not satisfactory. They are also denying opportunities to participate in the administration, even in the making of decisions that affect their life and welfare.

### **WOMEN POLITICAL PARTAKING**

After independence, at the time of the constitution adoption many women like Smt. Sarojini Naidu, Hansa Mehta, Renuka Roy, and Durgabai Desmukh etc. took part at the constitution creation. In the Indian Constitution a guarantee of equality and dignity of all individual is provided and also claimed the fundamental rights of women to political and legal equality and guaranteed non-discrimination in employment and office under the states.

Indian Constitution provides many channels for the women development and progress. The precludes of the Constitution, the chapters of Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of the State Policies etc., are the specific objectives of this purpose. These constitutional provisions are meant to empower 48.9 per cent women population in India. Many government and non-government agencies are working for the development of women but in practice we find a wide gap between the stated social objectives and achievements, between the legal framework and empirical realities, between the symbolism and actuality. And this is the reason that after these constitutional safeguards and legal frameworks, the partaking is still very low.

There are three indicators to assess the political partaking of women.

- i. Partaking in the political process as the voters and candidates in election.
- ii. Political attitudes such as awareness commitment and involvement in politics and autonomy in political action and behaviour.
- iii. Their impact on the political process.

The credit goes to Narasimha Rao government when 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992 Panchayati Raj Act, which not only, provided autonomy to the grassroots but it also provided reservation of one-third of seats for women in every Panchayat and municipality, not less than one-third seats shall be reserved for women belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

This may be allotted by rotation from the constituency to constituency. Till the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Amendments no one was sure about the role to be played by the women in the process of development of the society and women themselves. Since the PRIs have potential to start the process of women empowerment from the village level, it can change the social scenario of the village. The PRIs provide village women, the opportunities for leadership and to take part directly in the decision making in the process of development. It will also help in managing the violence against women.

So the following factors had attracted to take the problem of women empowerment through PRIs for this work.

These are:

- i. To create a healthy environment to exercise women's rights equal with men in rural areas.
- ii. For equal partaking of women in decision making bodies for their development and welfare.

- iii. To prepare women for political partaking in Parliament and Assemblies also with 33 per cent reservation.
- iv. To adopt an integrated approach for empowering women through effective convergence of the services, resources, structures and man power in related sectors.
- v. To organise women into groups as self help groups for economic empowerment of rural areas.
- vi. To generate political awareness and political partaking in village politics by women through PRIs.

### **CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS**

The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard.

### **CONSTITUTIONAL PRIVILEGES**

- i. Equality before law for women (Article 14),
- ii. The State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15 (i)),
- iii. The State to make any special provision in favour of women and children (Article 15 (3)),
- iv. Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State (Article 16),
- v. The State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)); and equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)),
- vi. To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities (Article 39 A),
- vii. The State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42),
- viii. The State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46),
- ix. The State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people (Article 47),
- x. To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e))
- xi. Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat to be

- reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat (Article 243 D(3)),
- xii. Not less than one- third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women (Article 243 D (4)),
  - xiii. Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality (Article 243 T (3)),
  - xiv. Reservation of offices of Chairpersons in Municipalities for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the legislature of a State may by law provide (Article 243 T (4)).

### **CONCLUSION**

This constitutional step was based on the premises that there can be no true democracy or no true people's participation in governance and development without equal participation of women in all spheres of life and at different levels of decision-making and then the goals of development cannot be fully realized without women's full and active participation not only in the development process but also in the shaping of its goals. It is well known that parliamentary democracy is the rule of majority and by ignoring nearly fifty per cent of women's population; no country can march towards attaining the goals of justice, liberty and equality under the socialist, egalitarian and democratic framework of India's Constitution.

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