

## **Women Participation and Empowerment in Panchayati Raj Institutions : A Sociological Study of Kila Parikshitgarh, District Meerut**

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*Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are considered as solution to every problems of rural development and is linked to empowerment of the marginalized section of society, especially women. Various Panchayati Raj Institutions theories generate competing hypothesis regarding the underlying various aspects of women and Gram Panchayat. To unravel some of these claims, data from a survey involving 200 women those are selected for Panchayat Pradhan in Gram Panchayat election, Parikshitgarh, Meerut, U.P. were used to assess the role of women in Gram Panchayat and to evaluate the performance of the women representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The study adopted a quantitative approach to research involving simple random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was an interview schedule, made-up closed ended questions. The results have shown that participation of women*

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*representatives including members from weaker section appears to have increased substantially over the years less free from decision making and consider women's preference to improve overall government policies. According to studies have also found that women representatives are literate; depend on husband and other family member, especially in taking decisions for the betterment of village and women empowerment. Women representative are not free to work at the gram panchayats due to dominance of their husbands and their male family members. In addition to, it was found their husband spend more time on political activities, while, women spend time in carrying out household activities. Overall, positive action through 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment has given women and marginalized communities a sense of empowerment though they are yet to reach an equilibrium level. Many researcher assumed that women and deprived class are bound to make further progress in their social status, leadership role, economic position and political awareness.*

[**Keywords** : Panchayati Raj Institutions, Political Participation, Women Empowerment.

## **1. Panchayati Raj Institutions**

In India, the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) now functions as a system of governance in which Gram Panchayats are the basic units of local self government of villages in rural India. This system was implemented by a constitutional 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment in 1992 by the recommendation of L. M. Singhvi Committee (1986). This Panchayat Raj System was formalized in 1992, following a study conducted by a number of Indian Committees on various ways of implementing more decentralized administration. The system has three phases: Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Panchayat. Currently, the Panchayat Raj System exists in all states except Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram and in all Union Territories except Delhi.

After Independence : After the Constitution came into force, Article 40 made a mention of panchayats and Article 246 empowers the state legislature to legislate with respect to any subject relating to local self-government.

However, this inclusion of Panchayats into the Constitution was not unanimously agreed by the decision-makers, with the major opposition having come from the framer of the Constitution himself *i.e.* B. R. Ambedkar.

It was after much discussion among the supporters and opponents of the village Panchayat that the Panchayats finally got a place for themselves in the Constitution as Article 40 of the Directive Principles of State Policy.

Since the Directive Principles are not binding principles, the result was the absence of a uniform structure of these bodies throughout the country. After independence, as a development initiative, India had implemented the Community Development Programmes (CDP) on the eve of Gandhi Jayanti, the 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1952 under the major influence of the Etawah Project undertaken by the American expert, Albert Mayer.

It encompassed almost all activities of rural development which were to be implemented with the help of village panchayats along with the participation of people.

In 1953, the National Extension Service was also introduced as a prologue to CDP. But the programme did not yield much result.

There were various reasons for the failure of CDP like bureaucracy and excessive politics, lack of people participation, lack of trained and qualified staff, and lack of local bodies interest in implementing the CDP especially the village Panchayats.

In 1957, the National Development Council constituted a committee headed by Balwant Rai Mehta to look into the working of community development programme. The team observed that the major reason for the failure of the CDP was the lack of people's participation.

The committee suggested a three-tier PRIs, namely, Gram Panchayats (GPs) at the village level, Panchayat Samiti (PSs) at the block level, and Zilla Parishad (ZPs) at the district level.

As a result of this scheme of democratic decentralization was launched in Rajasthan on October 2, 1959.

In Andhra Pradesh, the scheme was introduced on 1st November, 1959. The necessary legislation had also been passed and implemented in Assam, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, and Punjab etc.

The appointment of the Ashok Mehta Committee in 1977 did bring new thinking in the concepts and practice of the Panchayati Raj.

The committee recommended a two-tier Panchayati Raj institutional structure consisting of Zilla Parishad and Mandal Panchayat. In order to use planning expertise and to secure administrative support, the district was suggested as the first point of decentralization below the state level.

Based on its recommendation, some of the states like Karnataka incorporated them effectively. In subsequent years in order to revive and give a new lease of life to the panchayats, the Government of India had appointed various committees.

The most important among them are the Hanumantha Rao Committee (1983), G. V. K. Rao Committee (1985), L. M. Singhvi Committee (1986) and the Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State relations (1988), P. K. Thungan Committee (1989) and Harlal Singh Kharra Committee (1990).

The G. V. K. Rao Committee (1985) recommended making the 'district' as the basic unit of planning and also holding regular elections while the L. M. Singhvi committee recommended providing more financial resources and constitutional status to the Panchayats to strengthen them.

The Amendment phase began with the 64<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bill (1989) which was introduced by Rajiv Gandhi seeking to strengthen the PRIs but the Bill was not passed in the Rajya Sabha.

The Constitution (74<sup>th</sup> Amendment) Bill (a combined bill for the PRIs and municipalities) was introduced in 1990, but was never taken up for discussion.

It was during the Prime Ministership of P. V. Narasimha Rao that a comprehensive amendment was introduced in the form of the Constitution 72<sup>nd</sup> Amendment Bill in September 1991.

73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments were passed by Parliament in December, 1992. Through these amendments local self-governance was introduced in rural and urban India.

The Acts came into force as the Constitution (73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment) Act, 1992 on April 24, 1993 and the Constitution (74<sup>th</sup> Amendment) Act, 1992 on June 1, 1993.

## **2. Salient Features of the Constitution 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments**

These amendments added two new parts to the Constitution, namely, added Part IX titled "The Panchayats" (added by 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment) and Part IXA titled "The Municipalities" (added by 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment). Basic units of democratic system-Gram Sabhas (villages) and Ward Committees (Municipalities) comprising all the adult members registered as voters. Three-tier system of panchayats

at village, intermediate block/taluk/mandal and district levels except in States with population is below 20 lakhs (Article 243B). Seats at all levels to be filled by direct elections Article 243C (2).

Seats reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) and the chairpersons of the Panchayats at all levels also shall be reserved for SCs and STs in proportion to their population. One-third of the total number of seats to be reserved for women. One third of the seats reserved for SCs and STs also reserved for women. One-third offices of chairpersons at all levels reserved for women (Article 243D).

Uniform five year term and elections to constitute new bodies to be completed before the expiry of the term. In the event of dissolution, elections compulsorily within six months (Article 243E).

Independent Election Commission in each State for superintendence, direction and control of the electoral rolls (Article 243K). Panchayats to prepare plans for economic development and social justice in respect of subjects as devolved by law to the various levels of Panchayats including the subjects as illustrated in Eleventh Schedule (Article 243G).

74<sup>th</sup> Amendment provides for a District Planning Committee to consolidate the plans prepared by Panchayats and Municipalities (Article 243ZD). Budgetary allocation from State Governments, share of revenue of certain taxes, collection and retention of the revenue it raises, Central Government programmes and grants, Union Finance Commission grants (Article 243H).

Establish a Finance Commission in each State to determine the principles on the basis of which adequate financial resources would be ensured for panchayats and municipalities (Article 243I).

The Eleventh Scheduled of the Constitution places as many as 29 functions within the purview of the Panchayati Raj bodies. The following areas have been exempted from the operation of the Act because of the socio-cultural and administrative considerations :

- Scheduled areas listed under the V Schedule in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Rajasthan.
- The states of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram.
- The hill areas of district of Darjeeling in the state of West Bengal for which Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council exists.

- In conformity with provisions in the Constitution Amendment Act, an Act called the Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 passed by the Government of India.

### **3. Political Participation**

Political participation provides the citizens with “channels of direct access to the sources of authority.” Therefore, healthy, free and fair political participation are regarded as the life-belt of genuine representative government, serving important functions for both the citizens and the political system. It also relates to shaping and reshaping of power, authority or influence (Prasad, 2002).

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### **4. Women Empowerment**

The first step for the political empowerment of women has been initiated with 33 per cent of seats being reserved for women in the



Panchayati Raj institutions under the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act for Panchayati Raj institutions. Already over a million women are now functioning as elected members in the councils of Panchayati Raj institutions and municipal bodies. One-third of these institutions are headed by women as Sarpanchs, Chairpersons, Mayors, etc. (Rao, 1992). Interestingly the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment and the policy and implementation of the 33 per cent reservation for women in Panchayats received strong support and impetus due to Rajiv Gandhi's interest and advocacy in the matter (Kattimani, 2011). The Indian Institute of Social Science (2000) in a study of the Panchayati Raj in Haryana has reviewed the progress of some hundred elected women in four districts; majority of the elected women panchas including younger women were illiterate when elected to office. After two years in office, they demanded literacy skills and generally felt the need of education for their daughters too. Panda (1996) in her study of a village Panchayat in Orissa found that women entered into politics due to the mandatory provision of reservation. Most of the women were from non-political background and had entered politics due to coercion by their family members or pressure from the village community. The important aspect of her study is that the women who reluctantly entered into politics showed great maturity in outlook, enthusiasm, increasing political consciousness, and increasing perception of their role and responsibility.

Empowerment of women is the process of strengthening the economic, social and political status of women in their social life or society by which they have dignified and regarded life. One of the major interventions used by women empowerment promoters is to empower women through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) thereby to ensure their participation in the process of political decision making. The 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment is a milestone mainly for two reasons: a, it facilitated local empowerment and b. it ensured women's empowerment. It provides 33% reservation in Panchayat for women.

Same proportions (one third) of the offices of chair persons of Panchayats have been reserved for women. Currently the reservation for women is set at 50% at Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) level.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to present a thematic review on women participation and empowerment through light on

the levels of their awareness about the capacity to take self-decision, participation in community activities, their socio-economic conditions, decision making power of women at Panchayat level.

## **5. Objectives of the Study**

1. To assess the role of women participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)
2. To evaluate the women empowerment through the women participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

## **6. Area of the Study**

Geographically, the Kila Parikshitgarh is Nagar Panchayat in Meerut district in the state of Uttar Pradesh. There are many villages near it. There are main crop like sugarcane, wheat, etc. Kila Parikshitgarh area is covered by Gurjars, Bania, Prajapati, Pandits, Jat, Tyagi, Goswami, Muslims. It is situated in north western Uttar Pradesh, in a close proximity to the Ganga river. It lies between latitude 28°59' North longitude 77°56' East.

It is near to the village Hastinapur, situated in Mawana tehsil itself. Kila Parikshitgarh was selected for the study.

## **7. Data and Methods**

A survey involving 200 women respondents those are selected for Panchayat Pradhan through the use of an interview schedule. An interview schedule was found suitable for the data collection because it afforded the researcher the opportunity to interpret the questions in the local languages understood by respondents which otherwise would have been next to impossible using questionnaire. First objective examined women participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions of the respondents. Second objective analyzed women empowerment level of the respondents. Further, the questionnaire was structured closed ended. The actual data was collected by researcher herself between March and April 2018. The total number of the respondents was 200. This aim was to generate a sampling frame for the study. All 200 respondents were randomly selected for the study using the simple random sampling technique. The unit of analysis for the study were women respondents that participated in the Panchayati Raj Institution who were aged 18 years and above. The rationale for interviewing respondents aged 18 years and above



was that is Kila Parikshitgarh 18 years is the age of maturity and ability to give consent.

In research, both primary and secondary material have been used to collect data. After collecting the data, the data was analyzed by statistical method. The data was also tabulated. Statistical assistance has also been taken for data analysis. One main challenge encountered in the study was that there was no database (sampling frame) on women participation and empowerment in the Kila Parikshitgarh, Panchayati Raj institution.

## **8. Discussion and Conclusion**

Panchayati Raj System was established by lighting the lamp in Nagaur by then prime minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti on 2 October, 1959. In the beginning, the Panchayati Raj System started getting relaxed in socio-economic and cultural development of the village and in its last phase it became dead.

In order to fulfil the objective of reform, the constitution amendment bill was introduced in Parliament which was passed as 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act 1992. This amendment act came into force throughout India from 24 April 1993. Several effective steps have been taken in the act towards strengthening and empowering the status of women, but its most important features was to ensure the participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Through this amendment, seats were reserved for women and scheduled caste in Panchayats and municipalities. The following are the findings from the data related to political participation and empowerment of women playing a role in Panchayati Raj System.

From the research presented, it is concluded that women are financially dependent on husband on family. This dependency does not allow them to work independently in Gram Panchayats and if women work independently then they have to face many social and family problems.

After the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment, women are choosing to hold, reserved positions in Gram Panchayats, but their election is based on the consent of their husband and family. For this reason, the work of women selected in the post is done by their husband of family.

The degree to work independently has arisen in women, which has led to the renunciation of the mentality of boys and girls is their children. Women are paying more attention to the education of girls so that illiteracy does not become an obstacle in their lives later.

Through women empowerment and political participation, women have taken steps towards the elimination of social evils like *parda partha*, dowry system, gender discrimination, female feticide murder etc.

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