

Role of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions

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Abstract

The theoretical and practical dimensions of women's roles in democratic decentralization are highlighted in this study. This essay aims to comprehend the position of women in the Uttar Pradesh district of Meerut's panchayati raj institutions. The primary objectives are to comprehend the circumstances that allowed women representatives to lead and participate in PRIs in spite of the obstacles and limitations they encountered, as well as how these actions are altering the dynamics of local self-governance. The main data gathered from several villages in the Meerut district, as well as secondary sources. We have used survey technology and collected primary data from 80 respondents belonging to different gender, age group and categories. Women's Place in Panchayati Raj Organizations

Key words: Decentralization, Amendment, Panchayati Raj, Grassroot democracy.

Introduction

Formal decentralized government takes the shape of the panchayati raj institution. This is the transfer or distribution of decision-making authority together with the delegation of necessary authority to people or groups at every organizational level, even if they are situated far from the centre of power.¹ In this sense, decentralization refers to the transfer of governance authority and powers from the federal and state governments to institutions operating at the sub-state level. Gram panchayats are the fundamental units of local government under the Panchayati Raj system of governance that is now in use in India. Three tiers make up the system: Panchayat Samiti (Block level), Zila Parishad (District level), and Gram Panchayat (Village level). It was established by the 73rd amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1992. All states, with the

exception of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram, as well as all Union Territories, with the exception of Delhi, currently follow the Panchayati Raj system.

The foundation for decentralized government in India is established by the 73rd amendment to the Indian Constitution (1992), which went into force on April 24, 1993. This Amendment established the Panchayats as units of self-government, mandated that the states transfer control over 29 topics directly related to the social and economic development of a region, and included provisions for regular elections to local bodies, resource sharing between the Panchayati Raj institutions and governments, reservation of socially disadvantaged classes and women, among other things.²

The decentralization of policy is expected to bring about a significant transformation in India. In response to several committees established by the 73rd amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1992. All states, with the exception of Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Mizoram, as well as all Union Territories, with the exception of Delhi, currently follow the Panchayati Raj system. With the declared goal of revolutionizing local development planning and democratic involvement, the Union government of India approved the 73rd Amendments, 1993 in response to many committee recommendations and political demands. In India's history of democratic decentralization, the adoption of the 73rd constitutional amendment acts was a significant accomplishment. The legislation gave local governments a lot of leeway in creating and executing local programmes. The legislation gave local governments a lot of leeway in creating and executing local programmes. Due to this legislation, local governments in India now have a constitutional standing, which has increased their vitality and legitimacy. The grass-roots democracy movement gained a unique energy and vigour with the passage of this Act.

History of PRI's in India

The Panchayati Raj System has existed since antiquity. During the Vedic era, local self-government was in effect. The village has consistently been the most significant social and economic entity. Since ancient times, it has been the basic unit of government by nature. Village (Gramme), in Manu's opinion, was a basic unit. Manu said that the Village (Gramme) was the basic administrative unit between the Town (Pura) and the City (Nagara).³ The Vedic literature states that the village headman, known as Gramini, was typically in charge of overseeing, directing, and controlling the administration.⁴

Throughout the Buddhist and Jain periods, the people had complete autonomy over decision-making.⁵ One of the tenets of the Panchyati Raj in the fifth century B.C. was equality for everybody. During the Gupta era, decentralised administration systems were developed. Within the Decan local In the fifth century B.C., the Panchyati Raj upheld the ideals of equality for all. The village's power was ruled by the king during the Mauryan era. Villages were free to operate economically and politically. The Gupta era saw the emergence of decentralised administration systems. Mahajan were in charge of local administration in the Decan local government. The village assembly, which included every adult resident, constituted the highest authority.⁶

The panchayat system existed throughout the mediaeval era of the Sultanate. Panchayats handled matters related to sanitation, education, etc.⁷ The provinces, which were further subdivided into tiny units of villages within districts, constituted the highest echelon of the Delhi Sultanate. Village governance functioned well in the early Mughal era. Panchayats, which were composed of five people or more, continued to maintain vigilance, ensure order and Mughal cooperation, and resolve minor conflicts.⁸ The decline of the village administration system began with the arrival of British authority in India. The hamlet lost its authority and clout as a result of the government officials' excessive concentration of the executive and judicial branches of government.⁹ The British considered Indians to be ignorant, primitive, and incapable of functioning in democratic systems. In Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta, municipal corporations were established with the ability to tax.¹⁰ In response to the Mayo resolution, the provinces of Bombay, Bengal, Punjab, and North Western Province (UP) approved the 1871 Act for rural regions. The Lord Ripon resolution of 1882 was a turning point in local self-government and was referred to as the "Magna Carta" of local democracy. It promoted local self-government as a means of achieving administrative efficiency and provided them with political and educational training to enable them to engage with the system.¹¹

A further chance to fortify Panchayats across the nation was presented by the 1935 Government of India Act, which included provisions for provincial autonomy. The majority of the province administration believed that legislation granting additional authority to local governments, particularly Panchayats, through further decentralisation was imperative. This state of affairs persisted until 1947, the year the nation became independent.¹²

Gandhiji's entire focus during the Indian independence struggle, which lasted from 1920 to 1947, was on achieving freedom for the country, however he occasionally voiced his opinions about village presidents.¹³ The necessity of democratic decentralisation as the best system for India was recognised by Gandhiji. It can only exist in places where the democratic system is sufficiently robust at the local level, according to him. Above all, he was against democracy. He asserts that twenty persons seated in the middle cannot negotiate the terms of real democracy. Everyone in every hamlet must figure it out from the bottom up.¹⁴

As the world began to change on the verge of independence, local government became increasingly important. The foundation of the government of Gandhiji's ideal of a free India was rural self-governance, or Swaraj. He supported the panchayati raj, or democratic decentralisation, which is the grassroots level of rural popular dominance and sovereignty. According to the aspirations of nationalist leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, India might achieve "Ram Rajya" by bringing back some of the ancient civilization's finest customs and recreating native institutions more adapted to the local way of life. After learning that panchayati raj had not been included in the previous draft of the constitution, he requested on having it included in the revised draft. Panchayats, in his opinion, should represent the people's voice in our independence.¹⁵

On October 2, 1952, following independence, the community development plan was launched. The program's goals were to change people's perspectives, instill a sense of independence, and create a cooperative action habit via popular bodies—all of which would bring about fresh vigour, optimism, and enlightenment.¹⁶ The first committee to be constituted to assess the effectiveness of National Extension Service and Community Development was the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, following independence. States have also appointed committees to enhance the apparatus and framework of Panchayati Raj and review the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee. Opposition parties claimed that the Congress Party sought to strengthen its position by preserving the status quo of leadership in Panchayati Raj Bodies, which had led to public mistrust and authoritarian trends in administration. The performance of Panchayati Raj Institutions across several States was also deemed unsatisfactory.

Hopes for regaining democratization at all levels of the political system became strong with the triumph of the Janta Party in 1977 at the federal level and at several State levels. Following a shift in the Central Government in 1977, Asoka Mehta was selected as the chairman of the High

Level Committee on Panchayati Raj Institution. In order to boost agricultural output, generate jobs, combat poverty, and enhance the rural economy overall, the government gives rural development top priority, according to the resolution.¹⁷ Mandal Panchayats, which comprise between 15,000 and 20,000 people, were heavily emphasized as the hub of development. Additionally, the Committee has recommended a proposed constitutional status to panchayat.¹⁸ In order to propose strategies for improving the efficacy of decentralized planning at the district level, the Planning Commission established the Hanumantha Rao Committee in 1983. Local public participation is essential, as the Committee emphasized. The planning process requires the engagement of the public, particularly at the grassroots level. Consequently, the PRIs play a vital role in the development, implementation, and progression of local planning initiatives.¹⁹

On March 25, 1985, the Planning Commission of the Government of India established a committee chaired by Professor G. V. K. Rao. This Committee was established to examine the current administrative frameworks for programs aimed at reducing poverty and promoting rural development. Its objective is to suggest suitable institutional mechanisms that will guarantee the smooth and integrated planning and implementation of these programs. The Committee suggested better integrating block and lower level planning with lower level PRIs, as well as fortifying Zila Parishads and district level planning.²⁰

In order to create a proposal on the resurgence of the PRIs, the Federal Government of India established a second committee in June, led by Dr. L. M. Singhvi. It recommended a constitutional clause to guarantee regular, fair, and unhindered elections for the PRIs.²¹ The Panchayati Raj is also included in the 1988 Sarkaria Commission on Center State Relations report. Comprehensive recommendations were also presented by the Thungton Committee (1988), a subcommittee of the Consultation Committee affiliated with the Ministry of Personnel.²² On May 15, 1989, premier Rajeev Gandhi tabled the Constitution (64th Amendment) Bill in the Lok Sabha with the goal of empowering PRIs to serve as efficient units of self-government by reviving and strengthening them. The Rajya Sabha rejected the Bill, despite the Lok Sabha passing it.²³ The amended Constitution (73rd Amendment) Bill 1991 was piloted based on its suggestions and a general consensus. It was eventually passed by the Lok Sabha on December 22, 1992, and the Rajya Sabha on December 23, 1992, as the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Bill. Following ratification by more than half of the State Assemblies, the

President of India granted his assent on April 20, 1993, and the Act was enacted by a The President of India granted his assent on April 20, 1993, and the Act was enacted by a government notification on April 24, 1993, following the Narsimha Rao government's takeover of power at the national level in 1991. The recommendations of the ratification process were approved by more than half of the State Assemblies. There are significant provisions for Panchayats at the village, block, and district levels under Schedule XI, Article 243-A to 243-O, Part IX of the Indian Constitution.²⁴

Participation of women in PRI

The preamble and fundamental rights of the Indian constitution, which protect and provide women's equality, contain references to the notion of gender equality. The Indian Constitution's 73rd and 74th amendments are significant steps toward ensuring women's political empowerment. The Indian constitution's 73rd amendment went into effect in 1993, bringing changes to the panchayati raj institutions, which are the country's rural governing bodies. The amendment gives women a 33% reserve for chairs and members in the three-tiered PRI structures. One million women have been elected to office as a result of the reservation's massive rural woman mobilization. There have been overt efforts in the last several years to raise the political involvement rate of women. The bill pertaining to women's reservations However, the measure pertaining to the women's reservation policy is a very sad tale, since it keeps being derailed in parliament. However, women have been granted representation in the panchayati raj system as a symbol of their political empowerment. A number of factors underline the role that PRI institutions play in the empowerment of women, including the fact that more and more women are rising to the challenge and preparing to engage lower-level politics in a spirit of self-governance as devoted citizens.

Over a million women are involved in Indian politics thanks to the experience of the Panchayat Raj Institutions. In order to improve job and livelihood opportunities in rural regions, PRIs can engage with women to create, grow, and promote MSMEs, cooperatives, and self-help organizations.

By bringing poverty, inequality, and gender injustice to the state's attention, female panchayati raj leaders are revolutionizing local governance. The topics that women choose to focus on via

PRI, such as domestic violence, alcoholism, abuse, education, and health, demonstrate how women are transforming government. Along with advocating for girls' education, women are also fighting against child labor and child marriage. In addition, women have addressed the importance of access to high-quality healthcare through their elected positions. Women's problems have gained prominence at the municipal, state, and federal levels as a result.

Women make up almost half of India's population, yet their influence in political institutions' decision-making processes has been little thus far. Women's reservations in a political system dominated by males, which has until far denied them a voice, are expected to eliminate inequality while offering them a chance to engage in political education and mobilization on a far bigger scale than they had previously. Women who have seats reserved for them in PRIs have the chance to voice their complaints and take an active part in the official political process that addresses social and economic issues.

Although members of parliament have not yet reached an agreement on the women's reservation bill, which would reserve 33% of the seats in the national and state legislatures for women, the influence of the 1/3rd seat quota for women in panchayati raj institutions is undeniable. The greatest achievement of panchayati raj is the increased political and social authority granted to women. There are 26 lac panchayat delegates in our nation; of them, 9 lac are women and 8.5 lac are members of the SC and ST categories. Additionally, this figure is the highest worldwide.

Bihar made the audacious decision to reserve 50% of the panchayati seats for women, despite the fact that under the panchayati raj system, women are only granted 33% of the seats. Presently, 54% of the panchayat seats in Bihar are occupied by elected female members. Sikkim followed the lead set by Bihar, raising the quota rate for women to 40% and holding elections in January 2008 under the new system. Laws boosting women's panchayat reservations to 50% have been approved in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand. These modifications will take effect with the next panchayat elections for these seats. Rajasthan, Bihar statewide Women now have 50% of the seats in Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand. This has exposed the impoverished, illiterate, backward Dalit people to political and social life. This change has led to the gram panchayats' agendas starting to prioritize more crucial topics including health, roads, water, and education. Women's involvement in political institutions is considered to be one of the most empowering practices. The revival of the Panchayati Raj

Institution in general and the empowerment of women, SCs, and STs in particular were the goals of this historic event. This legislation's Article 243(d) provides for the reservation of SCs and STs in these institutions based on the population of the respective area. This is on top of the thirty percent of seats that have been set aside for women (including the seats allotted for women from SC/ST categories). The tool aims to provide these marginalized and oppressed communities more power and freedom from various forms of oppression. The specifics of how reservations for women and members of scheduled castes and tribes are to be granted are outlined in Article 243D of the Constitution (73rd Amendment Act, 1992).

For the past ten years, women's access to decision-making institutions has significantly grown due to legislative enactments. Women are allocated 33% of elected seats in municipal governments at various levels of local governance, according to the 73rd constitutional amendments enacted in 1993. Moreover, a third of the positions as chairpersons of these bodies would be reserved for women. Additionally, women from the Sc/St group are entitled to one-third of the seats. This modification was extended to schedule v areas by the Panchayats Extension to Schedule Areas Act of 1996 (PESA). Due to this, women's involvement in municipal bodies has significantly expanded.

Commencing on December 24, 1996, this modification was expanded to include Panchayats in the tribal regions of eight states: Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Rajasthan. This amendment provides for the delegation of authority and responsibility to the panchayats in relation to the formulation of plans for economic development and social justice, as well as the execution of the 29 subjects enumerated in the eleventh schedule of the constitution. Additionally, the amendment grants the panchayats the power to levy and collect the appropriate taxes, duties, tolls, and fees.²⁵ With the passage of the Act, all states with a population of more than two million will have a three-tier Panchayati Raj system; Panchayat elections will be held every five years, and seats will be set aside for women, scheduled tribes, and scheduled castes. All states with a population of more than two million are expected to implement a three-tier Panchayati Raj system under the Act. Additionally, Panchayat elections must be held every five years, and seats must be set aside for women, scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes. A State Finance Commission will be appointed to recommend changes to the Panchayats' financial authority, and a District Planning Committee will be established.²⁶

Finding

A basic survey was conducted in several villages within the Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh to evaluate the role of women in panchayati Raj institutions. Numerous insights about the social and political empowerment of women in the panchayat raj institutions of Uttar Pradesh's Meerut District are offered by the most current study. The study was conducted using primary data that was gathered from various demographic groups in the Meerut district. We have made an effort to comprehend how women function in PRIs. We have gathered primary data and employed survey technologies. The data is routinely processed and examined when it is collected.

S.No.	Questions	Yes	No
1.	Women get reservation in panchayat election	72.2	33.3
2.	Women given same rights as men in PRIs	44.4	55.5
3.	Women have to vote at the behest of their family members	61.1	27.7
4.	Women allowed to make their own decision in panchayats	33.3	66.6
5.	Women in the panchayats allow to take decision after becoming Pradhan	38.8	61.1
6.	Reservation given to women in PRIs has led to women empowerment	66.6	33.3
7.	Women contest in election by her own decision	11.1	88.8
8.	Women are weak in the field of management	61.1	38.8

After analysis, we discover that women's political mobilization happens extremely infrequently as a result of our society's patriarchal structure. 52% of the women legislators are single, 7.3% are widows, and 86% of them are married. Age is a significant factor; just 3.5% of persons are under 30 and 96.5% are over 30. We learned that the Meerut district has extremely low levels of high caste group engagement in politics. Grassroots politics has been dominated by non-high castes. Similar to the caste system, we see that Muslim women only seldom engage in grassroots politics in our research region, while Hindu women predominate there. Based on our

observations, it seems that women's engagement in local self-government has been significantly influenced by the Reservation. Through PRIs, women are effectively elected from all reserved seats and participate in rural decision-making.

According to our poll, the majority of respondents concur that women play a crucial role in panchayati raj institutions. However, we also discover that women vote based on pressure or advice from their families. A woman elected to the chairpersonship, whether in a reserved or general seat is not able to make decisions for her. They have to labour in accordance with their family's male members. Following the reservation, rural women who had previously been primarily restricted to their homes and were unable to make decisions on hiring decisions for them is now actively involved in the process. Upon observation, we discover that 62% of women actively participate in the decision-making process and 92% routinely attend panchayat meetings. Our observations show that women's empowerment has emerged effectively in the modern world. In the Meerut district, women are effectively involved in policy decision-making and have been elected to all reserved seats. Women now have significant employment in the district of Meerut's patriarchal society.

Difficulties

The village council is made up largely of elected female delegates. However, much like the guys in charge, their power is limited. The apparatus of government frequently overrides their judgments. It is essential to develop and empower these female leaders so they can effect positive change for women in their communities. All of this demonstrates how far gender equality and women's empowerment still have to go, and in fact, may have gotten harder recently. The fundamental cause of the discrepancy is that targeted programmes typically only have a limited effect when the average woman is not reached by the main push of development, leaving her life more precarious and vulnerable. Every city and community should have access to basic infrastructure in order to bring about positive change. First off, improving cleanliness and the availability of safe drinking water have a direct positive impact on women's lives and health while also lessening the burden on them to provide and maintain these amenities. Women are questioning men's authority because they are fed up with the frauds, crimes, violence, alcohol, and drugs that permeate today's politics. The spouses and daughters of members who were denied seats owing to reservation make up a sizable share of the women elected to these seats.

These women are denigrated in some circles and treated like puppets by their male kin. But these women also have the extremely beneficial function of enhancing the visible presence of women in positions of authority, which is the first step in transforming the way society views regarding the notion that women are capable of exercising authority and holding positions of power. However, it is also true that a similar, if not higher, percentage of women elected to local bodies are legitimate practitioners who have established important partnerships at the local level.

Although women are now guaranteed participation in municipal government by constitutional rules, their mere membership does not guarantee efficacy. The most competent women are never chosen to be leaders. Women who are related to current local leaders frequently win elections to occupy the designated seats. Women in rural regions are frequently ill-prepared to engage in politics successfully due to a variety of factors, including economic dependence, patriarchal ideals, religious beliefs, family obligations, and conservative attitudes. Elective women have occasionally stayed at home with their husbands attending panchayat meetings and handling official business on their behalf. Women have occasionally represented powerful lobbyists at councils or the opinions of males in a proxy capacity.

Suggestions

It is recommended that the rotation term for the reserved post for women be extended to two or three terms. This is because the first term for women representatives is often a learning time, and only in the second and third terms do they begin to demonstrate their true abilities.

Women from low-income households who put in longer hours at work ought to be compensated for the days they spend working for the panchayat and attending training. Only women from low-income families may be eligible for this provision.

Utilising the expanding capabilities of information technology, we need to build a transparent, open society for women.

Education for women is a must. Education enlightens people about their responsibilities and rights.

Women ought to join independently in politics.

Conclusions

For a society to be gender fair and equal, women must be politically empowered. Women have the ability to influence decisions and the course of their communities, thus it is imperative that they take part in the political process of the country. Women were granted 33% reservation in panchayati raj institutions upon the implementation of the 73rd amendment. Ten lakh women participate in the nation's political process and take on rural welfare responsibilities with each panchayat election. Due to this exposure, a whole new group of women workers at the village level have emerged and are being trained as new participants in the democratic process.

Engaging with panchayati raj institutions is thought to be the best way to eliminate their helplessness, obscurity, and inequity. The current study is focused on women's empowerment in general as well as their political engagement, particularly at the local level of political functioning. Decision-making still needs to go a long way, even with the improvements. The primary barrier to increased women's engagement is the low literacy rates that are common in rural communities. Together, the care economy, gender budgeting, and women's empowerment will greatly enhance rural development and support inclusive development.

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