



**TOPIC: PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN VILLAGE PANCHAYAT**

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**ABSTRACT**

It has been seen that even after so many significant changes in the status of women in Indian village; the condition of women is still the same in many remote areas. They are going out to work and contributing in their family income but the gender discrimination is still there. Women have contributed to civilization equally in all walks of life across time and space. But still their socio-economic and political positioning with respect to the male counterparts has always been a matter of debate and concern. However the reservation of 33% of the total seats in Panchayat for women brought a revolutionary change. In this paper an attempt has been made to examine the impact of 33 percent reservation in local body elections on empowerment of rural women and also the problems faced by them.

**KEYWORDS:- *Women, Village Panchayat, Women Empowerment***

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**INTRODUCTION**

In India the condition of women especially in villages is not hidden by anyone. Time has changed but women are still there, they are not allowed to go out and stand on their own. Traditions like Sati and Devadasi among some communities have been completely banned in India. However, some of these practices are still found in some villages in India. The purdah is still practiced by Indian women in some communities. Child marriage however is common in some remote areas, although it is illegal under current Indian law. There is lack of nutritional education among the



girls in villages and many women are also on the receiving end of the violence from their male counterparts and also from the female in their in-laws for the want of dowry.

However Women's empowerment is as such a new which can be used in two broad senses that is, general and specific. In a general sense, it refers to empowering women to be self-dependent by providing them access to all the freedoms and opportunities, which they were denied in the past only because of being "women". In a specific sense, women empowerment refers to enhancing their position in the power structure of the society. One of the major instruments of delivering recognition and power of decision making to the population in general and women in particular has been the emergence of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

### **Reservation in Village Panchayat**

India took an important step towards deepening democracy when it passed the 73rd amendment in 1993. One of the important features of this amendment was to give reservations to the SCs, STs and women. The amendment states that 33% of the gram panchayat seats (in some states the reservation for women has raised from 33% to 50%) and 33% of the sarpanch (the elected head of the gram panchayat) seats should be reserved for women. Every gram sabha gets a female sarpanch by rotation and the gram sabha is reserved for a female sarpanch after every 10 years. This was indeed a crucial step considering the low status of women in India and their consequent low participation in the public life.



## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Following are the main objectives of the study:

1. To know the positive impact of women participation in the village panchayat resulting in their empowerment.
2. To study the major challenges faced by women in panchayat.
3. To bring out some important suggestions to overcome the problems faced by women in panchayat

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The descriptive method of research is used in this study. The findings reported in the study are based on the data collected from the secondary sources. The secondary data is collected through Journals, and by accessing web.

## **POSITIVE IMPACT OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN THE VILLAGE PANCHAYAT**

Women empowerment refers to the process by which women acquire due recognition at par with men, to participate in the development process of the society through the political institutions. Above all, empowerment is the result of participation in decision-making. Also they are more accurate to take in decision making process being more patient than men. Women today are trying to realize their position in the society. They have become increasingly aware of gender inequalities in every sphere of life and are seeking the ways to fight them. Following are some of the reasons due to which we can say that the provisions of Social Justice



Committee at different levels of Panchayats will have a reasonable positive effect towards their empowerment.

1. Women are regaining the sense of self-worth and are no longer willing to take a backseat.
2. They want to be treated with respect and dignity and now hate any ideas or ideology that treat them as a commodity.
3. Women want access to opportunities and resources, without any discrimination, for their economic independence
4. They are also being awarded for the tremendous work done by them and want to take decisions on matters bearing on them.
5. They want to be able to influence the social and other changes playing a more active role in nation building activities.
6. Last but not the least they want total control on their own lives without any undue interference from any quarter. A substantial number of scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) women have been elected to the Panchayats.

## **FEW EXAMPLES OF WOMEN SARPANCH LEADERS SHOWING INDIA THE WAY FORWARD**

The mention of the word 'Sarpanch' generally brings to mind an image of an elderly white haired man, probably with a turban and a big moustache, holding in his hands a stick and in his gaze the fear filled respect of an entire village. Rarely does the



image of a woman ever come to mind. Following women sarpanches are the perfect examples of rocking rural India :

1. **Arati Devi** (sarpanch at Ganjam district in Orissa)

Former investment banker and MBA holder Arati Devi started a major literacy campaign for women in the panchayat where only signatures would be recorded for official applications, instead of thumb impressions.

2. **Meena Behen** (first woman Sarpanch in the small village in the district Vyara, Gujarat)

Their village has an all-women Panchayat board.

In their village, women were never allowed to go outside their houses. They were not even allowed to talk in front of men or in their presence. They can never be leaders, was the reaction of many people in Meena's village including the women also, says Meena Behen. But she kept on going and did better every time. Being an all-woman Panchayat board, the issues that women and children face come out easily in the open now. Pregnant women found it really difficult to go to the hospital so they built roads for easy accessibility. Under a Government scheme they have built over 30 houses in their village.

3. **Chaavi Rajawat** (the youngest female sarpanch of Soda village, Rajasthan)

Chhavi Rajawat, (incidentally a young, first woman Sarpanch in India with an MBA degree) makes her village India's first IT enabled village. There is a technology education lab in the village. There are also online postings of birth and death certificates, besides posting land records online.



"Most youth in the village are unemployed, as they don't have higher education due to absence of a college. We want to change that with e-education," says she. After becoming the Sarpanch of the village, she has implemented many projects successfully i.e. rain water harvesting, she has brought better water, toilets facilities in most of the houses, paved roads, solar power, and a bank to her village.

She is an inspiration to many and is the face of the young and modern India yearning for change.

4. **Sushma Bhadu** (sarpanch from three villages in Haryana- Salam Khera, Chablamori and Dhani Miyan Khan)

Sushma Bhadu has gained popularity for improving the dwindling education and sex ratio levels of her villages. But she is more popular for the "lifting" of her 'ghunghat' in 2012 with the backing of her mother-in-law and her husband. Dhani Miyan Khan has a zero dropout rate at the village's only school. She also makes sure that every child in the village attends school.

5. **Radha Devi** (sarpanch of a village in Rajasthan)

Despite the Right to Education Act, 1000s of children across Rajasthan do not go to school. Women sarpanch leaders stepped in to make sure that this trend turn around and girls attend school. Taking the help of local NGOs and SHGs, Radha Devi confronted the school authorities in her village and convinced parents into sending their kids back to schools.



6. **A sixty year old woman sarpanch - Rajkala Devi** (the first woman sarpanch (village head) of Hingwada Gram Panchayat in Alwar Distric of Rajasthan)

India has been an inspiration for women to participate in local politics. On being elected she has addressed a host of key issues in her village like women education, availability of Below Poverty Line (BPL) ration cards, road construction and access to safe drinking water among others.

“My focus is on girls’ education. I really believe that the village can only be progressive if girls are educated,” she says. She frequently visits the Anganwadi Centres to ensure that the children get proper meals and that there are sufficient teachers “For five years I will stay as Sarpanch and in these five years I will ensure that all women get justice,” Rajkala says.

## **THE MAJOR CHALLENGES BEING FACRD BY WOMEN IN PANCHAYAT**

Discrimination in society has a very complex reality, what is really troublesome is that the government officials also treat such elected Panchayat representatives with neglect and apathy. Such mind-set and practices further limit the effectiveness of elected Panchayat representatives.

1. The male politicians used to recruit only those women who are appropriate to benefit in their design or only those who are not expected to and capable of threatening their supremacy.





2. The Indian Government has introduced 33% reservation for women in panchayats. But these women representatives are mostly relegated to a puppet status. Decision making stills remains in the hands of men. As a result the female voice continues to stay silent.
3. They could not acquire political experience take up issues/programmers concerning women, articulate demand or represent femininity. Seen in over all perspective, women's contribution to the panchayat raj decision making was out-and-out insignificant.
4. In various village panchayats, instead of taking charge themselves women depend on their husband's opinions. They are missing out on a great opportunity to empower themselves and bring about change.
5. It is also true that caste discrimination and atrocities on SC and ST households continue unabated in various states, this is so despite various constitutional provisions and legislative measures. Thus, elected women Panchayat representatives, particularly from SC and ST communities face massive discriminations even sexual harassments in performing their public roles effectively.

## **SUGGESTION**

It is therefore, suggested that following action need to be taken up so that in future women will see that their voice is important to the community:-





1. Women members should be educated and focus should also be given on rapid reading.
2. Women members should exercise authority assigned to them effectively.
3. They should not depend on the male co-members or any other family member rather they should take up independent decisions in the interest of all.
4. Women members should build up political consciousness. They should grab all the opportunities.
5. The provisions should be so amended that no such exploitation against women leaders should be there by the male members. Social Justice Committees could be legislated to be an integral part of each tier of the Panchayat Raj system in all states.
6. Family and Government support: This was identified as a key area requiring attention. Encouragement by the families in the form of admiration of their decision sand their official work would help in encouraging for their active participation in decision making. Similarly the government officials need to be more patient towards them and cooperate with them in their work and facilitate them to understand their work.
7. Training on various aspects of the PRIs should be provided to the women members and all other PRI members & concerned local officials. Provisions of the 73rd Amendment, writing records, conducting meetings, maintaining



community assets, financial management, education, unemployed, understanding of bureaucratic structure, government schemes for the rural poor, public distribution system, etc. are some of the areas in which training could be given to them.

## **CONCLUSION**

Though women comprise half of the Indian population but still they have been facing discriminatory social ethos resulting in denial of equal status and opportunities in social, economic and political field. Further, more rural women lag far behind the urban women. Half hearted efforts were made to improve conditions of rural women. From 1993 onwards women have got the chance to occupy at least 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the seats in village panchayats. Women panchayat member are emerging out of their homes, they are moving from place to place, word to word sometime accompanied by male colleagues. Women are regaining the sense of self-worth and are no longer willing to take a backseat People are coming to them, their opinion are being sought. They are gaining the trust in the eyes of villagers. These are some emphatic changes already visible, which otherwise would not have happened without reservation provision. Reservation is a means not an end because some women leaders still are facing problems from the society, their voice is still silent, also they are lacking their family support. To make it fruitful and successful both men and women should make every effort in the best way and in the right direction to ensure that the end is achieved.



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