

**Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions: With Special
Reference to Jammu and Kashmir (India)**

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ABSTRACT

Democracy and positive socio-economic change of Indian society can only be achieved by decentralization. Decentralization is a move towards the development at grass root level by active participation of adult rural people. Decentralized democratic governance is being regarded as "both a right in itself and a mean of ensuring basic human rights observance" (Gloppen et al, 2003). The 73rd constitutional amendment Act of 1992 has made an effort to give special power to Sc's, St's and women in all three tiers of Panchayati Raj. But there are many obstacles in the way towards the empowerment of women in the Panchayati Raj system. In this context this paper aims to know the extent of participation and awareness of women Panchayati members. The article 1 of Indian constitution explains the idea of political justice and equality. Different measures like 73rd constitutional Amendment which opened the gates of opportunities for women aims at eliciting their active participation in decision making process in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Keywords: *Decentralization, Participation, Responsibility.*

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Introduction:

The self-governing Institutions at local level are essential for national growth and participation of people in decision making. The Panchayati Raj Institutions enables the people to feel a sense of responsibility and to inculcate the values of democracy. Awaken political consciousness on the country side and to engender the democratic process in rural India. Women constitute half of the humanity and no nation or society can develop without its half population, if a nation needs to be developed they need to work unitedly and step forward. As per the 2011 census, Jammu and Kashmir has population of 12,541,302 of which male are 6,640,662 and female are 5,900,640. The woman is the main agent and target of development process.

Objective of the study:

- To study about the empowerment of women through Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- To study about the 73rd constitutional amendment Act, 1993.
- To study about the participation and awareness of EWR's.

Women's participation and its importance.

The question of women's representation in politics in all over the world began to assume importance since 1975 when UN declared 1975 as the 'International Women's Year'. This was followed by the UN's decade for Women (1976-1985) with the theme "Equality, Development and Peace". In India, the question of women's participation in decision-making process got the attention of the Committee for Status of Women in India (CSWI) in 1974. It was the status report by CSWI in India titled 'Towards Equality' (1974) which came as a shock to Indian women who realized that even after 27 Years of independence, not only were they performing the traditional roles expected of Them by men, but also had been characterized by illiteracy, poor health, marginalized Employment, violence and had no role in the decision-making process in any spheres of life (Singla 2007). Women representation in politics has dominated the Indian political discourse in recent years. The women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions may take many forms. It refers to all those activities which show women's involvement in process and administration, that is,

participation in policy formulation, program planning, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs meant for development target groups.

In India Panchayats have been in existence since long. Weaker sections i.e., women and SCs/STs, however, have not been an integral part of this system before 73rd amendment. The Panchayati Raj Act, 1992-popularly known as 73rd amendment-was enacted in the country to revitalize the Panchayati Raj Institutions besides providing for reservation to women and SCs/STs. The provisions of 73rd amendment were not extended to the State owing to the special status of J&K under article 370. However, some of its provisions were incorporated, through amendments, in the State Act. Still these provisions do not bring the State Panchayat Act at par with the 73rd amendment. To promoting institutional participation the state plays an important role. Panchayati Raj Institutions and community development programs were introduced mainly for the women's participation in decision making. The women's exclusion is attributed to the rigid social structure, which has perpetuated discrimination against women. This is true in the case of women in Jammu and Kashmir as well. The gender dimension was brought into the local governance system and women were elected to the grass root level democracy in Jammu and Kashmir in 2011.

Women's participation in 2011 panchayati election was bold step towards the empowerment of women in Jammu and Kashmir. Out of 4128 sarpanch posts in the 22 districts of state, only 29 women managed to win the elections. According to the data compiled by the chief electoral officer of the state, there is no women sarpanch in 10 of the 22 districts as male candidates have won the elections for all the posts in these districts. Out of 10 districts in valley 8 districts do not have a single woman sarpanch. Surprisingly leh district of the state, where women are considered to be farmore assertive than their counter parts in other districts, has also failed to elect women sarpanches. The only district in Jammu division not to elect any women as sarpanch is kishtward. The remaining nine districts of Jammu region have representation of women as sarpanches, but the percentage of winners is negligible.

Women's participation in the panchayat elections started shaking up the political culture of state. Panches and sarpanches joined the fray and we found rural Kashmir undergoing a sort of renaissance. The empirical evidence also suggests that elected panches do not have sufficient education and understanding of working and functions of grass root level institutions. However, one can not underestimate the impact of women's participation in the panchayati Raj Institutions in politics, governance and delivery mechanism.

Criticism against women panchayat members

Awareness about the prevailing political system is essential for the functioning of the members to enhance and facilitate their performance.

The participation of women in every developmental field whether government or private is increasing, but still there are many problems faced by women panchayat members like:-

1. In Panchayat meetings the elected women representatives are represented by their male related members. This is the main concern that elected women representatives are interfered in the official activities.
2. The awareness level of elected women representatives about different issues and process related to Panchayati Raj Institutions is very low.
3. The elected women representatives are controlled by their family members especially husband and other male members.
4. The representation of elected women is ineffective and insufficient due to responsibility at home, inexperience, etc.
5. Illiteracy is the main hurdle in women's participation. According to Gandhi, "if you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate an entire family".

Conclusion:

There are provisions for equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their social, economic and gender status in Indian constitution. But at the ground level the situation is different is different especially in case of women. It is right to say that the 73rd constitutional amendment Act 1992 has opened the gates of opportunities for women, but goal of empowerment of women does not end here. The role of Panchayati Raj Institutions is the most significant in the empowerment of women. We have to first create a positive environment for women in social and economic sphere. We have to provide opportunities to women for equal participation in decision making at different levels. However, the goal of political empowerment of women does not end with their induction in Panchayati Raj Institutions, but after getting elected as a member, the real role begins then. The achievement of the goal of rural development depends on the efficiency of PRI's and PRI's efficiency depends upon its members. To conclude we can say that the co-ordination of various sections of society such as religious heads, political leaders should come forward and should appreciate that the women are equally as important segments of society as men.

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