



# Role of Panchayat in Women Empowerment in Rajasthan

Kailash

Assistant Professor, Political Science, Govt. College, Barmer, Rajasthan, India

**ABSTRACT:** Even after the independence of the country, no special importance was given to women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. When we think about the questions of women's freedom, their participation in politics and their coming ahead in the society or their equality with men, then a pathetic condition of women in the society emerges. Women and men have equal rights in the Indian Constitution. Women have also been provided compulsory participation in the decentralization of power by the Panchayati Raj system. Participation should not only be formal but active. Rural women panchayat representatives are also constantly striving in the efficient discharge of their role while battling with constant problems. Their path is still difficult, but through Panchayati Raj Institutions, rural women have made their place important. The awareness among rural women is gradually increasing. According to the time and circumstances, there is a need to study continuously on the problems faced by women leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Presented research paper The status of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions was studied with special reference to Barmer district of Rajasthan state

**KEYWORDS-**panchayat, women, empowerment, Rajasthan, rights

## I.INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment is the key domain in the Role of Women in local government in Panchayati Raj Institutions find its prominent role in the sustainable development in society. Panchayats have been the backbone of grass root democracy in the Indian villages since its beginning. Gandhi had aptly favoured the Panchayati Raj and his dream got translated with the passage of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 (or simply the Panchayati Raj Act), which introduced the three-tier Panchayati Raj system to ensure people's participation in rural reconstruction in general and that of women in particular. It came into force with effect from April 24, 1993. [1,2,3] Gandhiji advocated panchayat raj as the foundation of India's political system Emergence and enactment of 73rd Amendment in Indian Constitution heralded a new era of vigorous campaign with an irrevocable commitment to the engenderment, betterment, empowerment, strengthening, emboldening and epitomizing the Women by giving the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) a statutory status. The 73rd Act provides Women an access to PRI and reserves one third seats for Women in three tier system of Panchayati Raj. It is an exercise of capacity building for sustainability and "Holistic development" and growth of much neglected half of the population of India. The journey of woman has been apparently oppressed, perennially perturbing, abysmally abject, meanderingly tortuous, patiently painful, knowingly dismal, deliberately tumultuous, systematically anti-matriarchal, strategically ambivalent, glaringly glorious, historically hostile, conventionally suppressed, venially vexatious and scientifically androgynous et al. The path of subjugation and mindset of marginalization adopted by male-oriented social setup in global terms qualifies this above charted course. The path of gender discrimination has waded through various ups and downs since times immemorial. As Dr. S. Ram relates this issue in his famous book, Women Through Ages. "Feminism investigates that why women are marginalized and there are many divergence of views as they look at this very question from their ideological and methodological perspective". This 73rd Act in Rajasthan Panchayati Raj System becomes a vehicle of social change and Acts as The Harbinger of Women's engendering the Panchayati Raj Institutions since its inception in 1994. [4,5,6] The Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act 1994 provides for reservation of one third of elected seats for Women at three levels i.e. Gram Panchayat (G.P.) Panchayat Smiti (P.S.) and Zila Prishad (Z.P.) There is also one third reservations for women to the seats of chairpersons of these PRIs. These women include general and scheduled castes. This act further provides for reservation of one third seats for Schedule castes women out of total seats reserved for schedule castes in proportion to S.C. population. The engendering Panchayati Raj Institutions in Rajasthan requires rigorous regimen of total overhauling of social structure per se. In fact, engendering Panchayati Raj Institution in Rajasthan is a euphemistic concept. The PRIs are in infantile stage and lack in all encompassing approach. Bluntly stating, women are still at a periphery of progress in the eyes of policy makers and decision takers. Engendering is a process of creating conducive climate for an ambience which is free from compassion traps, free from segregation, destroys and debunks 'Discriminations Myths, Misconceptions, Biases, Bottlenecks, Prejudices' and. As Dr. S.Ram explains," Gender is a socially constructed, internalized category by which the subordination and oppression of women is constructed and



constantly reconstructed". Engendering process connotes a process of inclusion of women in polarization-free and compartmentalization-free approaches of a balanced society. The residual share of decision making and decision taking can be compensated for only by a proper implementation of Acts regarding PRIs and will also debunk man made Myths, Barriers, Misconceptions, Biases, Bottlenecks, Prejudices and Discriminations against women. The journey of engendering society passes mainly through various tunnels, tones, tenors, trials and tribulations from invisibility to visibility, from immobility to mobility, from silence to vocality, from acquiescence to protest, from margin to mainstream, from personal to public participation in democratic ways.

Making gender inclusive Gram Panchayat Development Plans, ensuring gender justice and promoting gender equality would help address discriminatory social norms and practices at the family and community level thereby enhancing the value of women and girls. Thereby help realize the Vision of the Sustainable Development Goals

Ensuring gender responsive development planning Promote action for tackling discriminatory norms and structures. Enable the organization of Mahila Sabhas in order to promote women's participation and understand their needs and concerns. Ensure the preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plans with the involvement of women and girls Initiate community level actions to ensure improved value of women and girls. Integrate gender in the constitution and functioning of Gram Panchayat level Standing Committees. Facilitate convergence with existing structures at the village level such as Self-Help Groups and National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) to empower women and increase their autonomy[7,8,9]

Promote the enforcement of national and state policies, programmes, schemes and laws made for women and girls in the panchayat and also build public-awareness about them through publicity and IEC-efforts, through use of Information and Communications Technology

## **II.DISCUSSION**

Rajasthan, one of the state of Indian Union is the sample state of this study. It has an important place in the history of rural local self government (RLSG) in the county. It was at Nagaur, a district of this state that the late Jawaharlal Nehru, inaugurated the RLSG on 2nd October 1959 and hailed it as „the most revolutionary and historic step in the context of new India.” However, RLSG in the state after this impressive start stagnated over long period and testified to the lack of commitment to democratic principles of the political leadership, which had at various stages and in varying degrees, contributed to their decline. The state leadership's failure to hold elections to the RLSG bodies regularly and its propensity for superseding them for political reasons reduced these bodies to a mere caricature of democracy. However, the state of Rajasthan in the wake of the 73rd amendment has ushered in the new RLSG by enacting the Rajasthan Panchayat Raj Act and three-tier structure of the system has been established and functioning after the 1995 RLSG elections. Empowerment through political participation has brought women to the mainstreams in order to develop and enable themselves to take part in decision making process for the society. In India, Backward classes like SCs, STs, OBCs and women have always been marginalised in the society since a long period of time. After independence, Constitution has provided rule for their empowerment. The rural local self government is one basic fundamental principle of Indian system adopted in 1959 after the recommendation of Mehta Commission. The rural local government system has already been present in the old form of Indian society, nevertheless, it was dominated and regulated by only few people of the society and the role of the lower class sections of the society was being restricted (Mathew 1997). The rural local self government primarily aims to ensure people's participation in the governance of the country and emphasises the need of women's participation in it. Women's participation in rural local self government is essential as it will help to empower them and build up their competence so that they may be able to influence and work like pressure groups for the development and in the decision making process independently at the grass roots level. It is an established fact that provisions of reservation has helped them to acquire political positions in the rural local self government institutions, but mere acquisition of positions does not imply the effectiveness of participation. Therefore, an attempt has been made in this project to assess and evaluate the levels of their participation in the institutions in Rajasthan.[10,11,12]

Thus a large number of women have contested in the last RLSG elections and in some cases, they have succeeded in the general seats also. It is only attributed to the new Panchayati Raj Act and their capacity to win. The reservation system for women in RLSG institutions have not only provided them an opportunity but also have encouraged to attend the meetings of these institutions and influenced the process in decision-making process (Lal 2005). However, this type of political empowerment is insignificant at GP level but it is satisfactory at PS and ZP levels. Moreover, it is the beginning of the process and is certainly going to help to empower women in future (Hooja and Hooja 1998). Thus, The Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 has increased the proportion of women representatives in RLSG institutions of the state. However this opportunity has not been availed by them in real sense and their political mobilisation and active participation in RLSG, particularly at GP level is not of the desirable standard (Arya 2003). It does not mean that



the Act has any weakness in this regard. In real sense, it is because of their social and economic backwardness. Therefore, social and economic factors are being required for the political empowerment of women in the rural society (Kumar 1999).

### III.RESULTS

In the light of 73rd constitutional amendment, 1993 which provides for them much needed constitutional sanctity (a new life) and vitality to the RLSG in term of devolution of political administration and financial powers to the grass roots level government in the country, in this section, the scholar to examine and evaluate the empowerment of women. The major findings are as follows Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act provides for reservation of seats for SCs/STs in proportion to their population, 21 for OBCs, here total reservation for SC/ST does not exceed 50 per cent and 50 percent for women. The project reveals that women have definitely come to power through this provision, but they can play their expected roles only after proper training, experience and education. Illiterate chairpersons have to depend on their secretaries whereas women sarpanch and pradhans in some of the cases take assistance of their husband and relatives. One of the most striking aspects of RLSG elections is that there is qualitative difference in the meaning of the vote when it comes to federal and state elections, versus voting for panchayats. While, federal/state elections are extremely well organised, village level politics are inherently problematic. In fact, some of the historical electoral malpractices especially the use of violence and the stuffing of ballot boxes, which are said to be diminishing, are making their presence felt in village level elections. It is at this level that we see informal institutional practices reinforcing the structural biases against women candidates. The most crucial obstacle in the way of real political empowerment of women through RLSG occurs at the stage of the filing of the nomination for candidature itself. Most women file their candidature for elections to RLSG institutions not out of their own will, but due to the pressure of husbands, sons or other male member of the family or the village or due to the pressure of some political party. This phenomenon is even more apparent in case of women belonging to SC or ST. In order to fulfill the reserved quota, the political workers have to deploy various strategies to convince the women and one of the most adopted strategies is to influence the women through the family members. Zenab Banu (2001) argues that it is extremely difficult to make tribal women stand for Panchayat elections as they consider panchayats as bad and full of quarrels Corruption in RLSG elections (Chauhan 2003) is also responsible making the participation of women in the process a mere tokenism since due to the constrains of village societal norms, indulgence in such practices fall strictly within the male domain. Bribes in the form a liquor or cash are offered. Muscle power and money power are used extensively. Women would not stand a chance in the elections if they do not have the support of the male members of the family. Even in the case of election expenditure, the management of it is left in the hands of the husband or other male members of the family, thus leaving no power in the hands of the woman (Banu 2001, 123). Corruption is also rampant in the allocation of resources and contracts at the Gram Panchayat level. Violence has also come to dominate the RLSG institutions elections in many states thus making participation of disadvantaged sections more difficult. Most such violence seems to have been resulting from the existence of „caste war“ (Panchayati Raj Update 2001). In such a situation, participation and performance of women belonging to SC or ST become absolutely impossible. Moreover, in places that suffer from armed conflicts, bloodshed is common in RLSG elections thus marring the participation of women (Institute of Social Studies Trust 2005).[13,14,15] Further, societal restrictions require that women do not venture into public spaces alone. The traditional concept of women’s real place being within the four walls of the house is strongly prevalent in rural India. RLSG institutions are mainly regarded as political entities that are associated with power; and power is traditionally a masculine concept, women are not associated with it. Women who mix around openly with their male counterparts in political meetings are looked down upon as women of dubious character. Therefore, although women can freely attend meetings that are held inside the panchayat office, the presence of women in Gram Sabha meetings is meager as such meetings are mostly held in open spaces and are mainly attended by males. It is also the case in many villages that the daughter-in-laws (bahu) of the house who generally belong to a different village are hardly allowed to have social intercourse with men of her husbands village. Hence participating in RLSG activities in public space is totally out of question (Hust 2002). Sometimes it also so happens that a number of villages come under one GP, in such cases representation and participation of women become difficult as women have much less mobility than men (Vyasulu & Vyasulu 1999). Household responsibilities also restrict the mobility of women. Another major impediment is the „two-child norm“ that has been made a criterion for contesting elections in Rajasthan. Rural India has a high fertility rate and children are borne early (Mathew 2002). Hence due to such norm it becomes extremely difficult for women to enter the RLSG institutions and even when they enter they are mostly confined.

In case of a woman belonging to Scheduled Caste, such restrictions become further binding since both upper caste female and male members refuse to intermingle with them in RLSG meetings due to the „purity-pollution“ practices. Lower caste representatives do not get much cooperation from the higher castes and women members would not dare speak in front of the high caste representatives (Mathew 2002; and Nayak 1996). While in case of ascribed status, the lower caste women get discriminated against, in case of social groups; it is the scheduled tribes who become mere



„rubber stamps“ in the decision making process of the panchayat. If not the husbands, they are dependent on the other male members of the family, villagers, sarpanch, political parties or government officials (Chauhan 2003). Despite reservation, there is little change in the customary patterns of exclusion (World Bank Study year 2001). Moreover, due to the dominant male discourse, women in panchayats find it difficult to raise issues that would run contrary to that discourse. Such handicaps are more blatant in case of women belonging to SC or ST category, as they cannot dare to take up issues that would provoke the ire of the so called upper caste male. There have been number of instances when tribal women members in the panchayat faced violence and rape when they dared to challenge the authority. Moreover, political parties also play a crucially significant role in directing the affairs of the panchayat. Winning an election requires political party backing. Due to this the elected candidates (men/women) remain loyal to the party line. Since political parties are most controlled by the so called upper caste lobby, disadvantaged sections find it extremely difficult to make their voices heard or had to become mere „rubber stamps“ to the dictates of the party. The ability to take up issue pertaining to gender sensitive discourse is also limited due to the resource restrictions, as money has to be spent as per the dictates of the government schemes and there is very little flexibility. Issues such as violence against women, female feticide and infanticide, women health, livelihoods etc are rarely taken up (Institute of Social Studies Trust 2005). Therefore, in such a situation, the argument that having women in political decision-making would bring about empowerment and justice is seriously questioned. The success of rural local self government largely depends on the representatives and officials who have to be deeply committed to the ideals of rural local self government institutions. It is widely recognised that rural local self government institutions have not brought all the expected benefits to the common man but the fact that these institutions of grassroots democracy have brought new changes in various fields cannot be denied. The credit for such development rightly goes to those representatives and officials who have selflessly worked in these institutions. There is a reasonable hope that new rural local self government will function for the empowerment of women of the society as a whole and realise the idea of self government, efficiency and welfare in the coming days.[16]

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The study covers women empowerment in Rajasthan and its Panchayat members of the state. As women constitute 50 percent of world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratios whereby female's population has been treated as lower in Indian society. Rajasthan and Haryana are two states in India majorly been in news since so long and still these states are fighting with the situation. Panchayatiraj system introduced through Empowerment of women in India particularly in Rajasthan state. As there are several illiterate women depends on their husband for their basic requirement even. As per Panchayati raj system women will be given equal rights as men, is a biggest victory of village women. Lady name Chhvi Rajawat sarpanch of her village Soda (60 Km from Jaipur city) set an example of women power and status in Rajasthan.

In one side where I am talking about Chhavi Rajawat on the second hand there are number of villages in Rajasthan state where we can found zero literacy in women, low sex ratio district like Alwar, Kota, Pali there are several problems of caste, gender discrimination, women illiteracy.[17,18,19] To empower women the basic requirement is to give them compulsory education, training and economic freedom. The major this about education is, basic education will certify as literate and empower the confidence in a person but to be in Panchayati System women should politically educated for their-self and society.[20] As by 2009 Indian government has raised reservations for women in all tires of Panchayati Raj system from 33 to at least 50%, which really affects the current scenario of women status in India. In this study the major focus is to find out the real picture of women status in Panchayati raj in Rajasthan State. [21]

#### REFERENCES

1. Banu, Zenab (2001), Tribal Women Empowerment and Gender Issues, New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers.
2. Chauhan, Abha (2003), “Women's Participation in Panchayats in Scheduled Areas With Special Reference to Madhya Pradesh”, A Decade of Women's Empowerment Through Local Government in India,[Online: web] Accessed 10 Nov. 2018 URL
3. Govt. of Rajasthan: Administrative Reforms Commission Report – Seventh on Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan, Chairman Mathur Shivcharan, Jaipur 2002. [Online: web] Accessed 10 Sep. 2018, URL: <http://www.rajasthan.gov.in/arc/arc7.pdf>
4. Various Rajasthan District Records
5. Zila Parishad, of various districts of Rajasthan , records of proceedings, 1995-2015.
6. Panchayat Samiti, Sangaria, Pilibanga Nohar, Bhadra and Tibbi records of proceedings, 1995-2015.
7. Hooja, Meenakshi and Hooja, Rakesh (1998), “Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan-Policy Issues and Concerns”, The Indian Journal of Public Administration, Vol. XLIV, NO.3, pp.468-477.



8. Hust, Evelin(2002) "Political Representation and Empowerment: Women in the Institutions of Local Government in Orissa after the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution", Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics, Working Paper No.6, August 2002, [Online:web] Accessed on 10 Nov. 2018
9. Jha, S. (2000), „Fiscal Decentralization in India: Strengths, Limitations and Prospects for Panchayati Raj Institutions,“ Background Paper No. 2, World Bank Unpublished Overview of Rural Decentralization in India, Volume 3.
10. Kumar, Amarendra (1999), "The First Finance Commission in Rajasthan: An Innovative Mechanism of Fiscal Transfer To PRIs" Kurukshetra Vol.47 No.5: 27-34.
11. Lal, B.K. (2005) Rajasthan Main Panchayati Raj: Naye Aayam, Panchayat Raj Department, Rajasthan, Jaipur.
12. Leiten, G.K. (2003) "NGOs and local government in Pakistan" Economic and Political weekly, Vol. 35(12-18 Aug.) pp. 2924-25.
13. Mathew, George (2002) "Panchayati Raj Institutions and Human Rights in India", International Council in Human Rights Policy [Online:web] Accessed 18 July 2017 URL [http://www.ichpr.org/paper\\_files/116\\_w\\_04.doc](http://www.ichpr.org/paper_files/116_w_04.doc)
14. Mathew, George (eds) (1997), Status of Panchayati Raj In the States and Union Territories of India, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.
15. Mathew, George, (2002), Panchayati Raj from Legislation to Movement, New Delhi Concept Publications.
16. Mathur P.C. (1998), "Gram Sabha in Rajasthan", Kurukshetra, Vol.48, No.1: 61-65.
17. Murthy, Ranjani (2001), Building Women"s Capacities: Interventions in Gender Transformations, New Delhi: Sage.
18. Nayak, Ramesh (1996), "Panchayats at Work: What it Means for the Oppressed?", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XXXI, (27):1765-1771.
19. Pal, Mahi (2004), "Panchayati Raj and Rural Governance-Experience of a Decade", Economic and Political Weekly, Jan.10:137- 143.
20. Palanithurai, G. (1996), New Panchayati Raj System: Status and Prospects, New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers.
21. Singh, Hoshiar (2001), "Local Government in India after 73rd Constitutional Amendment: An Assessment", Local Government Quarterly, Vol.-XXXI, No.1-2: 6-10