



**ROLE OF WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN MADHYA PRADESH:
ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

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Abstract:

Women contribute in the building and development of a nation. They play a significant role in the making of the civilized Society. The focal point of the family is also a woman. In Indian society the place of women has always been dignified along with changes in social conditions over time. They have been gone through different situations. They have faced situations in which they were sometimes considered worthy of worship and sometimes were treated animalistically and as slaves. The development of any society is directly related to the development of the women in the society. Development of individual, family and society cannot be imagined without the development of women. The evil practices such as patriarchy, dowry system, harassment, inequality, feticide, domestic violence against women, trafficking, prostitution etc. that violate their rights and values in the society must be eradicated. The paper offers reflections on issues and challenges that women face and deal with, to perform their role in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) with special reference to Bhind district in Madhya Pradesh.

Key words: *Local Self-Government, Patriarchal Society, Women Political Participation, Women Reservation, Panchayati Raj Institutions*

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INTRODUCTION:

Women have played an equally significant role as men in the history of human evolution. In reality, a country's success as a whole can be gauged by the position, employment, and job that women undertake in society. A nation's social, economic, or political development will stall if women are not involved in national affairs. The majority of women's household responsibilities combine with economic pursuits and the use of their labour and

skills to generate additional revenue for the family, enabling the family to live decently. They shoulder a lot of responsibility and carry out a variety of tasks related to managing the household, including childrearing, feeding, attending to farm labour, caring for domestic animals etc. However, the most crucial responsibility that women today must shoulder is their active participation in politics. One of her top goals should be the political empowerment of women, and both the government



and society must take action in this direction to encourage women to enter politics. Participation in local self-governments, which are more accessible to rural people, offers first steps in that direction.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment was enacted in the hopes that it would improve governance and give political space to the underprivileged groups in society, such as women and members of the scheduled caste and tribe (Sodhi & Ramanujam, 2006). Panchayati Raj Institutions have always been seen as a method to good government. Rural India's Panchayati Raj Institutions, which function as decentralized democratic grass-roots units of self-government, have been seen as a tool for socio-economic change. The 73rd Amendment, among other things, gave control of government to the people at the panchayat level by reserving 33% of seats and important positions for women. The foundations have been set to expand this social revolution to all levels of decision-making, it may be stated, as women's participation in panchayats is now slowly but definitely having an impact on grassroots governance. The fact that many social myths are starting to be disproved is maybe the most important feature of women entering provincial politics. In addition to boosting educational standards and tackling water sanitation and fuel issues, which were typically not discussed by men, women are also making significant contributions in these areas.

SIGNIFICANCE OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS (PRIS)

An important turning point in the development of Madhya Pradesh's panchayati raj institutions was marked by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 (Singh Y. , 2002). The Madhya Pradesh

government passed the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act (MPPR Act), becoming the first state to implement the panchayat system in December 1993, shortly after the 73rd constitutional amendment took place to encourage public engagement (Singh Y. , 2002). The main provisions of the Act were the establishment of the Gram Sabha at the village level (Chapter 2 of the MPPR Act, 1993) and the three tiers of Panchayats, with the Gram Panchayat at the village level serving as the lowest tier, the Janapad Panchayat at the block level serving as the middle tier, and the Jila Panchayat at the district level serving as the upper tier (Article 8, ch.3 of MPPR Act, 1993). The MPPR (Second amendment) Act, 1997 was passed to hold the Sarpanch more responsible for running the Gram Sabha meetings, however it was unsuccessful (Gupta, 2006). As then Chief minister Digvijay Singh remarked, "I did not expect panchayati raj to become sarpanch raj" (Manor, 2001). Eventually, a task force was constituted in November 1999 to recommend improvements to the system so that the rule of people might be established based on Gandhiji's concern for local governance, notably for village panchayats, which is reflected in Article 40 of the Indian Constitution (Malik, 2005). The Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act was substantially changed in 2001 as a result of the task force's recommendations, which included some notable Gandhians like Anna Hazare, Subba Rao, Nirmala Deshpande, and B.D. Sharma. In the year 2001, the name of the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act was changed to the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj and Gram Swaraj Act (MPPRGS Act, 2001) (Behar, 2001). Decentralisation is the only way to make people self-reliant by entrusting



them with actual responsibilities making system more transparent. The establishment of Gram Sawaraj in Madhya Pradesh is an important step towards direct democracy (Gupta K. , 2009). A gram sabha (village assembly) is the foundation of local democracy (Kulkarni, 2012). Gram sabha is the basic institution of decentralised governance. As Yatindra Singh rightly said, “It is the first modern political institution that seeks to place direct political power in the hands of the people, without the mediation of elected representatives.”(Singh Y. , 2002).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

In the study of VaniKulkarni it is revealed that the gram sabha is not fully operational and has not made efforts for the panchayat system to become truly democratic. The meetings are often canceled or postponed (Kulkarni, 2012). The other study made by J. S. Sodhi and M. S. Ramanujam also states that people do not attend ‘gram sabha’ meetings and they are taking place only on paper in Madhya Pradesh (MP). The study stated that, “the presence of MPs and MLAs has become so strong that they have even been given the right to nominate their representatives to attend meetings of JPs and ZPs and actively participate.” The study also throws light on the gender biases during election of representatives. It stresses on the formation of Mahila Mandals and responsibility of political parties in encouraging women into PRIs (Sodhi & Ramanujam, 2006).

G. Palanithurai has laid emphasis on good governance and devolution of powers at the grassroots level. Devolution is needed for the deepening of democracy (Palanithurai, 2005). Two years later, he made another study revealing that

caste hierarchy and patriarchy are deeply embedded in the Indian society and “it is difficult to remove all the barriers and obstacles at the grassroots for the marginalized to participate in the decision making process.” It laid emphasis on social movement and strong support of civil society to the leaders who are in the process of mobilizing the poor and marginalized people for their full and active participation in PRIs (Palanithurai, 2007).

According to study made by Latha A. Pandit, women face several problems in the PRIs such as they get lack of time to attend meetings as they are overburdened with household chores, they have to walk long distances due to lack of transport, they have been victims of political violence and clashes between political parties, lack of education has created a new class of Sarpanch-Patis, the poor socio-economic background, and ignorance about their rights. She gave the suggestions that women MLAs and MPs must visit the villages to empower panchayat women, social awareness towards gender-equity and justice should be provided through mahilamandals, NGOs and elected bodies. In her words, “participation of women in the political process is not only to address gender specific concerns, but take a major step towards a more inclusive politics.” (Pandit, 2010).

Malini Nambiar in her study brings to the notice that social hierarchy is superimposed in Gram Sabha that the women related issues are never heard and women lack interest in attending meetings (Nambiar, 2001). According to Deepika Gupta, Panchayat Raj turned to be the Sarpanch Raj in Madhya Pradesh (Gupta, 2006). Chetana Singh in her study reveals that Sarpanch have become the power centre in the Village Panchayat System and it is a big threat to the



devolution of power. Bureaucratic setup has also proved to be the biggest hurdle. Office bearers are required to work efficiently for the proper functioning of the panchayat system as to construct a society enriched with social justice and economic development free from all types of deprivation (Singh C. , 2012).K. P. Mishra also talks about Sarpanch Raj in Panchayats that is to be corrected. The allocation of centrally sponsored schemes has been fixed and tied in which Gram Sabha has no independent role except the selection of beneficiaries. Politics and economy are integrally linked and Gram Sabha will be self-governing when it becomes self-sufficient. It is an urgent task to enhance the resource base of Gram Sabha. The village community should also generate its income to serve the interests of the community. The prevailing factionalism has been proved to be a major hindrance in the proper working of the Gram

Sabha. To achieve the goals of participatory democracy, Gram Sabha being a small forum of people's participation has miles to go. (Mishra, 2009).

Mahi Pal also shows in his study that there is lack of interest among villagers to attend meetings, ultimately they lack in participation of decision making process for their welfare and development(Pal, 2002). In other study, Mahi Pal has analysed on the basis of studies made that women are making progress in PRIs and increasing their participation and also encouraging other women to stand for election. It is a positive change in the society. He believes that, "social mobilisation could be done only through a social movement for greater autonomy of the panchayats in discharging their responsibilities."(Pal, 2004).





Source: <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/madhyapradesh/tehsil/bhind.html>(htt1).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The study tries to locate into the following:

1. To understand the nature of politics in PRIs.
2. To critically analyze the challenges women face.
3. To understand the role of women in PRIs.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY:

First of all, the existing literature available on the theme discovered and thoroughly studied to understand the status of women in politics and the hurdles they come through. As I found out that no study has been extensively done on the role of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Bhind district of Madhya Pradesh so I decided to do primary research based on primary data in the region. I prepared the draft to do research. I went to the field to collect data in the Bhind district. The sample size of the study is 41. The data was collected from 24 and 17 women respondents through interview method and focus group discussion respectively. Then, the data was analyzed.

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS:

The study is based on primary data collected from women respondents in the Bhind district. Bhind district is one among the three districts in the Chambal division. As I went to the field I observed many things and interviewed 24 women representatives at all the three levels of the rural local government and discussion was done with 17 women members of the Gram Sabha. One of the respondents stated that there is high influence of political parties and members of legislative assemblies (MLAs) in the political affairs at the intermediate and district level. She continued saying that she had to face caste discrimination during her

tenure. The other woman Sarpanch also revealed the truth that the money was illegally used in her name as she was not educated but when she got to know this thing she filed a case against the fraud and corruption. When I reached to talk with them at their residences and offices, they gave me time and also discussed the matters in an open way. On the one hand, they take decisions on the matters of women safety, public policies, education etc; on the other hand, they have to keep their mouth shut over the financial audits and they are restricted to raise their voice against the irregular functioning of the PRIs. Two of the Panch members revealed that they were still waiting for their honorarium. The provisions are made in order to make direct democracy functional at the grassroots level but there is a long wait further for the successful functioning. Nevertheless, women have made tremendous development and equal and more representation in the PRIs. They are coming forward in order to raise issues regarding their rights and participating in making public policies. Their status is changing in a positive way.

The issues and challenges women face are as follows:

1. Social barriers:

- a. In reality, society does not want women to do politics.
- b. Patriarchy still persists in society as women are mere representatives but the main work is done by men on behalf of women.
- c. Discrimination based on caste and gender still shows in society.

2. Economic barriers:

- a. Women do not work failing which have no incomes.

- b. Women every time need financial support of their male family members.

3. Political barriers:

- a. Not everybody has political ties so without support of political parties; it is difficult to acquire higher political positions in PRIs.
b. Corruption occurs in the name of political parties.
c. Harassments are faced by women leaders.

4. Cultural barriers:

- a. Women are not considered suitable for politics in Indian culture.
b. Education is not provided adequately.
c. Gender discrimination still reflects during the working of the local governance.

Role of women are as follows:

1. Patriarchy persists in society but in the modified form as women have started resisting.
2. Women are now vocal to raise their voice against the odds happen in their lives and region.
3. Women take part in decision making wherever they can. They take interest in making decisions regarding education, housing, public affairs, and women related matters.

Some of the suggestions based on the study are as follows:

1. Women should be given liberty to make decisions regarding their roles as accordingly without imposition of male members.
2. Proxy meetings should not be conducted on behalf on women representatives.
3. Reservation has made path easy for women to enter into politics so it is also necessary that good governance must prevail that make women to perform their leadership role accordingly and efficiently.

CONCLUSION:

With the enactment of the Seventy-third Amendment Act, 1992 in 1993, the Panchayati Raj Institutions became a tool for the women political empowerment. The reservation of seats for women has been made mandatory. Madhya Pradesh is the pioneer state in implementing the PRIs. It has given 50 percent reservation to women in PRIs. Women have also proved themselves while acquiring seats in PRIs. But it is not all easy for women to easily enter into politics. They face social, economic, political, and cultural barriers. The paper has discussed about the barriers come in life of women. It deals with the experiences of various women representatives. Women with the support of family members are making their place in the politics. Though the association with political parties is not necessary but political parties have impact and influence over the local politics in Gram Panchayats as well. It has been proved that women leaders play an important role in political development of other women in the society. Lastly, with the hope of words it can be said that it is a part of developmental process that people's participation will lead towards democratic governance (Mahor & Singh, 2012).

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Cite This Article:

****Dr. Milind P., (2023). Role of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Madhya Pradesh: Issues And Challenges, Educreator Research Journal, Volume-X, Issue-II, March-April 2023, 85-91.***