

DALIT WOMEN STATUS AND PANCHAYAT RAJ

INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

73rd amendment Act 1992 accorded special reservation for Dalit and offered a large chance to Dalit women to participate in Panchayati raj institutions in India. within the background of the very fact that this Act was enacted pan India in 1996 except Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, the present study inquires whether or not reservation policy provided by the 73rd amendment Act has empowered the increase of latest leadership among the Dalit, This study is focusing on impact of Dalit reservation in panchayat raj administration and makes an attempt to evaluate people. And also discuss to the Panchayat raj Institutions of Evaluation and committees and Social Status of Dalit Women in India.

Keywords: Panchayati Raj, Reservations, 73rd Amendment Act, and Dalit Women.

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In the year 1993, 73rd amendment in the constitution granted reservation to Dalits, Tribals and women in local government which made it compulsory that one third of the seats reserved for Dalits to be filled by Dalit women. Women's socio-economic Status directly depends on their participation in politics. They constitute half of total population, but are unable to get equal share in active politics. We can still see many women politicians as nominal leaders whereas their husbands play key role. The incapacity of women, particularly Dalit women, to assert their rights is at the root of the problem. The reservation for Dalits, particularly for women, is accepted only on papers but not in reality. Dalit women's sitting on chairs is seen as threat to social hierarchy. Dalit women also faced many problems in performing their duties due to illiteracy, lack of information and dependency on the male members of their families. This shows that human rights of Dalit women are violated right from her family to the society at large by one and all. All these factors are largely responsible for the precarious position of Dalit women as far as their social, cultural, religious, economic, health and political status in the society is concerned. These factors force them to mutely allow violation of their civic and human rights. Thus they become victims of universal violence. The evolution and triumph of Bahujan Samajwadi party (BSP) under the leadership of Kanshiram, is a drastic change in I

ndian politics. Though Mayawati's leadership has been criticized over years, she is an exceptional Dalit woman to overcome all the difficulties facing the upper caste men. Appointment of Mira Kumar as Lok Sabha speaker cannot be exemplified as upliftment of status of Dalit women.

Status of Dalit Women

The discrimination that Dalit women are subjected to is similar to racial discrimination. Dalit women are thrice discriminated, treated as untouchables and as outcaste, due to their caste, face gender discrimination being women and finally economic impoverishment due to unequal wage disparity, with low or underpaid labour. According to the Manusmrithi, women have no right to education, independence, or wealth. It not only justifies the treatment of Dalit women as a sex object but also promoted inequality between men and women. It also promoted child marriages. For any historically dominating caste or gender, it has been easier to violate human rights of Dalit women who are at the least step of the hierarchical ladder. Dalit and tribal women are raped

by upper caste leaders, land lords and police as part of an effort to suppress movements to demand payment of minimum wages, to settle share cropping disputes or to reclaim lost lands. This shows that Dalit women are easy targets for anyone. Upper castes consider them to be sexually available. Hence they are largely unprotected.

There have been many crimes on Dalit women which severely violate their human rights. According to SC/ST commission report, between 1981 and 1986 about 4000 Dalit women became victim of rape. In 1993 -94 this figure rose to 798 and 992 respectively. This number is about 700 every year. Social, religious and cultural practices like Chira, Devdasis and Jogins have made Dalit women victims. In the name of these practices, village girls are married to God by their helpless parents. These girls are then sexually exploited by the upper caste landlords and rich men and directed in “to trafficking and prostitution”. Despite of severe exploitation at work place, Dalit women also suffer caste specific ban on drinking water access and entry into temples from upper castes and may be physically punished for doing so. We see only Dalit women as manual scavengers which defames their dignity. A short article “Dangerous Dalit women and which Hunters” by Meena Kandasamy focuses the helpless vulnerable condition of Dalit women in the present times. So, in order to improve and get due respect of Dalit women, the various women’s forum and organization started as Dalit women movement to protect their rights.

The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957)

In 1957, Balwant Rai Mehta Committee studied the Community Development Projects and the National Extension Service and assessed the extent to which the movement had succeeded in utilizing local initiatives and in creating institutions to ensure continuity in the process of improving economic and social conditions in rural areas. The Committee held that community development would only be deep and enduring when the community was involved in the planning, decision-making and implementation process.^[5] The suggestions were for as follows.

- an early establishment of elected local bodies and devolution to them of necessary resources, power and authority,
- That the basic unit of democratic decentralization was at the block/samiti level since the area of jurisdiction of the local body should neither be too large nor too small. The block was

large enough for efficiency and economy of administration, and small enough for sustaining a sense of involvement in the citizens,

- such body must not be constrained by too much control by the government or government agencies,
- the body must be constituted for five years by indirect elections from the village panchayats,
- its functions should cover the development of agriculture in all its aspects, the promotion of local industries and others
- services such as drinking water, road building, etc., and
- The higher level body, Zilla Parishad, would play an advisory role.

The PRI structure did not develop the requisite democratic momentum and failed to cater to the needs of rural development. There are various reasons for such an outcome which include political and bureaucratic resistance at the state level to share power and resources with local level institutions, domination of local elites over the major share of the benefits of welfare schemes, lack of capability at the local level and lack of political will.

It was decided to appoint a high-level committee under the chairmanship of Ashok Mehta to examine and suggest measures to strengthen PRIs. The Committee had to evolve an effective decentralized system of development for PRIs. They made the following recommendations.

- the district is a viable administrative unit for which planning, co-ordination and resource allocation are feasible and technical expertise available,
- PRIs as a two-tier system, with Mandal Panchayat at the base and Zilla Parishad at the top,
- the PRIs are capable of planning for themselves with the resources available to them,
- district planning should take care of the urban-rural continuum,
- representation of SCs and STs in the election to PRIs on the basis of their population,
- four-year term of PRIs,
- participation of political parties in elections,
- any financial devolution should be committed to accepting

That much of the developmental functions at the district level would be played by the panchayats.

The states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal passed new legislation based on this report. However, the flux in politics at the state level did not allow these institutions to develop their own political dynamics.

G.V.K. Rao Committee (1985)

The G.V.K. Rao Committee was appointed by Planning Commission to once again look at various aspects of PRIs. The Committee was of the opinion that a total view of rural development must be taken in which PRIs must play a central role in handling people's problems. It recommended the following.

- PRIs have to be activated and provided with all the required support to become effective organizations,
- PRIs at district level and below should be assigned the work of planning, implementation and monitoring of rural development programmes, and
- The block development office should be the spinal cord of the rural development process.

L. M. Singhvi Committee (1986)

A committee led by Laxmi Mall Singhvi was constituted in the 1980s to recommend ways to revitalize PRIs. The Gram Sabha was considered as the base of a decentralized, and PRIs viewed as institutions of self-governance which would actually facilitate the participation of the people in the process of planning and development. It recommended.

- local self-government should be constitutionally recognized, protected and preserved by the inclusion of new chapter in the Constitution,
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- Non-involvement of political parties in Panchayat elections.

The suggestion of giving panchayats constitutional status was opposed by the Sarkaria Commission, but the idea, however, gained momentum in the late 1980s especially because of the endorsement by the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who introduced the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill in 1989. The 64th Amendment Bill was prepared and introduced in the lower house of Parliament. But it got defeated in the Rajya Sabha as non-convincing. He

lost the general elections too. In 1989, the National Front introduced the 74th Constitutional Amendment Bill, which could not become an Act because of the dissolution of the Ninth Lok Sabha. All these various suggestions and recommendations and means of strengthening PRIs were considered while formulating the new Constitutional Amendment Act.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act

The idea which produced the 73rd Amendment. Was not a response to pressure from the grassroots, but to an increasing recognition that the institutional initiatives of the preceding decade had not delivered, that the extent of rural poverty was still much too large and thus the existing structure of government needed to be reformed. This idea evolved from the Centre and the state governments. It was a political drive to see PRIs as a solution to the governmental crises that India was experiencing. The Constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act, passed in 1992 by the Narasimha Rao government, came into force on April 24, 1993. It was meant to provide constitutional sanction to establish "democracy at the grassroots level as it is at the state level or national level". Its main features are as follows

- The Gram Sabha or village assembly as a deliberative body to decentralized governance has been envisaged as the foundation of the Panchayati Raj System. 73rd Amendment of the Constitution empowered the Gram Sabhas to conduct social audits in addition to its other functions.
- A uniform three-tier structure of panchayats at village (Gram Panchayat — GP), intermediate or block (Panchayat Samiti — PS) and district (Zilla Parishad — ZP) levels.
- All the seats in a panchayat at every level are to be filled by elections from respective territorial constituencies.
- Not less than one-third of the total seats for membership as well as office of chairpersons of each tier have to be reserved for women.
- Reservation for weaker castes and tribes (SCs and STs) have to be provided at all levels in proportion to their population in the panchayats.
- To supervise, direct and control the regular and smooth elections to panchayats, a State Election Commission has The Act has ensured constitution of a State Finance Commission in

every State/UT, for every five years, to suggest measures to strengthen finances of panchayati raj institutions.

- To promote bottom-up-planning, the District Planning Committee (DPC) in every district has been accorded to constitutional status.
- An indicative list of 29 items has been given in Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. Panchayats are expected to play an effective role in planning and implementation of works related to these 29 items.

Present Scenario

At present, there are about 3 million elected representatives at all levels of the panchayat, one-half of which are women. These members represent more than 2.4 lakh (240,000) Gram Panchayats, about 6,000 intermediate level tiers and more than 500 district panchayats. Spread over the length and breadth of the country, the new panchayats cover about 96% of India's more than 5.8 lakh (580,000) villages and nearly 99.6% of the rural population. This is the largest experiment in decentralization of governance in the history of humanity.

The Constitution of India visualizes panchayats as institutions of self-governance. However, giving due consideration to the federal structure of India's polity, most of the financial powers and authorities to be endowed on panchayats have been left at the discretion of concerned state legislatures. Consequently, the powers and functions vested in PRIs vary from state to state. These provisions combine representative and direct democracy into a synergy and are expected to result in an extension and deepening of democracy in India. Hence, panchayats have journeyed from an institution within the culture of India to attain constitutional status.

Conclusion

The Panchayati raj system is a three-tier system with elected bodies at the village, taluk and district levels. The modern system is based in part on traditional panchayat governance, in part on the vision of Mahatma Gandhi and in part by the work of various committees to harmonize the highly centralized Indian governmental administration with a degree of local autonomy. The result was intended to create greater participation in local government by people and more effective implementation of rural development programs. Although, as of 2015, implementation

in all of India is not complete the intention is for there to be a gram panchayat for each village or group of villages, a tehsil level council, and a zilla panchayat at the district level.

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