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## Empowerment of Dalit in Panchayati Raj

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### **Abstract**

*73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act 1992 accorded special reservation for Dalit and offered a wide chance to Dalit women to participate in Panchayati Raj Institutions in India. In the backdrop of the fact that this Act was enacted pan India in 1996 except Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, the present study inquires whether reservation policy provided by the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act has empowered the rise of new leadership among the Dalit, or motivated them to participate voluntarily in the village body elections. Through the local body election in each village of India the following members are elected: Chairperson, President, and ward member, they have been playing a meaningful role in local governance for public good through the panchayat elections. This study is focusing on impact of Dalit reservation in panchayat Raj administration and attempts to evaluate how far these rights have been used by them for their political participation to meet the expectations of people. Most of the elected representatives of the Dalits and Dalit women are illiterate with insufficient literary knowledge about the functions and procedure of Panchayat Raj setup. Additionally, caste system plays a vital role in rural India toward impeding the function and delegation of panchayat raj power to deprived people across India. The high caste people who are economically and politically strong are capable of governing Panchayat administration than other community. Thus the status of other community people seemingly are pitiful and ignored in the Panchayat Raj administration by the affluent and dominant community. Dominant community as well as dominant political party appears unwilling to see the Dalit prosperity.*

**Key Notes :** 1.Panchayati Raj, 2.Reservation, 3. 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act, 4.Dalit and 5.Women.

### **Introduction**

India is a unique country of multi culture, caste, religion, custom and conventions based on the hierarchy system of India's age old culture. India's multicultural setup may facilitate the power holder and caste wise high rung people and it may not be suitable to lower class people. This caste system is playing vital role in all level of economic, political, social and cultural organizations of India's political sphere. The social divisions sanctioned by Indian culture are: Brahmin, Kshatriyas, Vysias, Shudras. Though this caste system was meant to be a division of the society for professions and vocations that people were to pursue, over many centuries it developed into a rigid system leading to the exploitation of the lower castes by upper castes.

After independence India's constitution guaranteed each and every individual with equal rights to participate in socio, economic and political affairs of the society. While the constitution mandated equality, people at the margins of the society, particularly the poor, are neither aware of their rights nor do they know how to exercise them. Rest of people in the upper rung, being well aware of all those information of village panchayat administration, organize their by accessing and appropriating government schemes and welfare measures. Most of the high caste people and who

are economically well got political power and participated in both general elections and panchayat elections. In this connection political systems and social systems needed to change at grassroots level. Gandhian thought of political power at grassroots level meant to uplift people who are economically weak. And not only high caste people to participate in political election, the disadvantaged people and low caste people also to participate for getting political power and to work for their village, community and society development. This would be called as decentralized democratic power of people.

After independence, India conducted first general election held 1951-52. This election is only for state and central level conducted for Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Most of the elected members were high caste people and people from economically good background persons are participating in these elections. Rest of poor and low caste people like Dalit and Disadvantage people were not much able to participate in the general election compare to other dominant caste members because, they don't have proper education, political awareness, economic weakness and also fearing to face and contest in the elections against the high caste people. On this basis Indian Government took long process and five more committees were appointed. Those committees are recommended to change, modify and suggestions to give a full shape of Panchayati Raj to establish a new Panchayati Raj Institutions in India. This new Panchayati Raj systems is called the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act 1992, is gives reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Women. The Dalit people's rights to Participate Panchayat elections on the portions of reserved seats not less than one-third of number of total seats on their populations consist of SCs, STs and women including Dalit women.

Democracy is considered as one of the best forms of government because it ensures liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and opportunity, fraternity as well as the right to participate in political decision-making. Participation and control of governance by the people of the country is the essence of democracy. Such participation is possible only when the powers of the state are decentralized to the district, block and village levels where all the sections of the people can sit together, discuss their problems and suggest solutions and plans execute as well as monitor the implementation of the programmers. It is called the crux of democratic decentralization.

### **Dalit in India**

The scheduled castes, also well-known as the Dalit, untouchables, the Antyaja, Harijan, tribes form a significant division of the Indian population. They are divided into approximately eleven hundred castes and sub-castes. Some of these groups in different states in India as share a common identity caste name and sometimes a common name. Everyone has a name, they are following their own set of rules and regulations, doing a separate occupation, its own mechanism for social control and more often than not. According to the Hindu law the peoples are divided castes and sub-castes into hierarchical order way. In this hierarchical order the scheduled castes peoples are coming under the bottom of other dominant caste, they are not equal status and their occupation like a slave for other dominant caste and doing polluting work. Even they are not allowed to bring water inside other dominant caste peoples area, and do not walk and do not enter inside of area unnecessarily, they are always staying the outside of village, many of them working as a bonded labour in high caste members who have economically wealthy and may or may not give any salary for their work. They have to give only limited access of food, clothes and small shelter, do not eat together, they won't get water from their hands and they do not allow inter-caste marriage among the different groups or castes. Simply saying they live as a inhuman being compared to other castes. The reason is they are very poor, illiteracy, inadequate knowledge about their rights, subaltern voice, restriction of

education facilities, they do not sit together in school and public places because of their doing manual work it's called dirty kind of occupations, they are not allowed to think independently, following their customs, traditions, rituals way of life circle from one generation to another generations also affected in this ways.

After independence Indian government gave special attention to raise their socio-economic and political position. The government is dealing with their problems in the three ways; that is social, economic and political. First; the government aimed to remove discriminations against the Dalit (SC/STs) with the help of numerous constitutional act and other legal provisions act. Second; they want to be better economic conditions to live stable in the society at the all level of situations. In this connection the government has taken steps related to general development programmes to aid without landless agricultural, schemes for low income groups, slum dwellers in towns and schemes for the schedules castes. Third; the political ways to give special reservation policy for scheduled caste people to protect themselves to discrimination and develop their community in political power. In this way the government has ensured their representation in parliament through the Panchayati Raj election in the form of three tier of representation of scheduled castes to the Grama Panchayat at village level, Panchayat Samiti at Block level and Zilla Parishads at District levels. So, the present study is based on the impact of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act 1992, which is giving political space for Dalit, especially women particularly Dalit women to empower through Panchayati Raj Institution.

### **The Impact of the Reservation Policy for Dalits in Panchayati Raj**

The reservation policy has allotted in the proportion of total populations of the SCs and STs in the percent of 15% and 7%. The reservation policy has given social mobility in the many ways of Dalits and other marginalized people in the field of education, occupation and income. Many of the scheduled caste persons have get jobs in the proportions of the reservation category of government sector as well as in public and private sectors. Now, they are enjoying certain amount of power, but the benefits of the reservation policy has not benefited these people as they face still discrimination. Some cases to certain family background who are slaved under the dominant group of peoples in particular communities. The most of the scheduled castes in villages are very poor, landless, uneducated, verbally abused by other group of people, ill - treated and will says that helpless people in village but now at least they got some political power to develop their community and villages at the same times their mind set still their bottom of high caste people even they come to as a position of village panchayat. The former dominant group of members still occupies their seats and they are not allowed to sit in their positions of the chair. They have rights to ask all things if will ask something or anything to become a caste violence to be happen and illegally space the many problems on that time. Some of the villages have cooperate together to working for village development activities to each other of scheduled caste and other caste peoples to give supportive actions, helping tendencies, friendships making, some of them accepting inter caste marriages in some villages in India. The reservation of Dalits in Panchayati Raj have been empowering in the field of education, economic, social and political ways.

“According to George Mathew, the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act brought two major changes in the Indian political System. First; democratic decentralisation was further extended in the country with the creation of 2, 50,000 Grama Panchayat, 6,000 Panchayati Samitis and 500 Zilla Parishads. In every five years, there are three millions of public representatives are elected, and as required in the act of these included around one million womens (33%), 6, 60,000 Scheduled Caste members (14.3%) and Scheduled Tribe (8%) members whom became representatives in the local

Government strata. Second; the changes occurred due to the creation of numerous Local Bodies (local governments), and the Indian federal system was transformed into a multi-federal system as a result of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act” (Mathew, 2000).

### **Impact of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act**

The 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional Amendment has created space for Dalit and Dalit women in political participation and decision making at the grass root level by providing that one-third of the seats are reserved in all over the country. 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment Act, 1992 (243D) says,

- ❖ In every Gram Panchayat there should be a Grama Sabha in each revenue village comprising all the voters of the area.
- ❖ Tenure of all the members in different tiers should be for a period of five years.
- ❖ Seat shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, in every panchayat and the number of seats so reserved bear, as nearly as may be, the same proportion to the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in that panchayat as the population of the Scheduled Castes in the Panchayat areas or of the Scheduled Tribes in that Panchayat area bears to the total population of that area and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.
- ❖ Not less one-third of the total number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- ❖ Not less than one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.
- ❖ The offices of the Chairpersons in the Panchayats at the village level shall be reserved for the SCs, STs and women in such manner as the Legislature of a state may, by law, provided that the number of offices of Chairpersons reserved for the SC and ST in the panchayat at each level in any state shall be allotted of the total population of the state. Not less than one-third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women.
- ❖ A Finance Commission shall be constituted for a period of every year for suggesting and strengthening financial position of the organs of the panchayat institution.

It is a major departure from the earlier Panchyati Raj System in the aspect of gender and caste reservation in all the three tier system for both seats and positions. This kind of constitutional provision have given political rights to Dalit and Dalit women in local governance and steadily gives thrust to more of Dalit friendly grassroots governance.

### **Women in Decentralization of Panchayati Raj**

“India is poor because the villages of India are poor. India will be rich if the villages of India are rich. Panchayats should be given greater power for we want the villagers to have a greater measure of real ‘Swaraj’ in their own villages.” (Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru).

At the present day we are passing through the greatest social experiment of our time. There is a historic confluence of two forces, the awakening of women and the emerging commitment to local democracy. This decision making power to the people at the village level including one million elected women local government representatives. These women are not only beneficiaries of change they are the key agents of change. Their role in society is not confine to fetch, to carry, to cook, and to pass year after year as a submissive silent slave, sold to life for nothing. This struggle for creating a new future for women encounters harsh opposition from patriarchal and feudal elements. Women who dare to contest election are victims of manipulation, physical attack, violence and jubilation. Against all odds elected women representatives (EWR) are making a difference, they are transforming the development agenda to address issues critical to village life such as health, education, and income generation and eradication of social evils. In this process, they are redefining leadership incorporating values such as honesty, openness, collective support, inclusion and accountability. They are changing village dynamics. Women leaders empower other women to step out of the home. Become literate and contribute to the community.

### **The Status of Dalit and Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions**

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment had the most profound impact on the socio-economic and political empowerment of Dalit and women. On account of 33% reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions one million women throughout the country are occupying considerable socio-political space. While many of these women are inexperienced, a process of social mobilization has already begun. However, there are a number of factors which limit women's abilities to participate fully in the political process. These include societal attitudes towards women and certain institutional barriers. Nevertheless, Panchayati Raj combined with literacy campaign and access to micro-credit are creating synergies that have the potential to transform Indian society and bring about greater gender equality. The process of social mobilization has made women think of reinventing gender roles in private and public spaces. Due to their increased visibility, the gender based distinction between private and public space is becoming blurred.

**Table: 1 Number of Elected Representatives in Grama Panchayat (Village Level)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>GP - (Total)</b>	<b>GP – (SC)</b>	<b>GP – (ST)</b>	<b>GP – (Women)</b>
<b>2001</b>	27,39,666	3,71,868	2,58,998	6,85,155
<b>2002</b>	16,30,327	2,38,437	2,31,984	5,48,794
<b>2004</b>	20,65,882	34,6,002	2,33,765	8,38,227
<b>2006</b>	26,56,476	4,90,986	3,14,324	9,75,116
<b>2008</b>	26,45,883	4,85,825	3,04,350	9,75,057
<b>2009*</b>	26,45,880	4,78,808	3,04,345	9,74,255

Source: Secondary Data from Ministry of Panchayati Raj in India.

GP\*: Grama Panchayat

SC\*: Scheduled Caste

ST\*: Scheduled Tribes

**Table: 1.2 Numbers of Elected Representatives in Intermediate Panchayat (Block Level)**

Year	IP – (Total)	IP – (SC)	IP – (ST)	GP – (Women)
2001	1,40,200	18,517	7,252	NA
2002	72,156	12,495	8,302	23,596
2004	1,09,324	22,333	8,210	47,455
2006	1,56,609	32,898	11,340	58,094
2008	1,56,794	32,968	11,406	58,191
2009*	1,56,557	32,690	11,364	58,012

Source: Secondary Data from Ministry of Panchayati Raj in India.

IP\*: Intermediate Panchayat

SC\*: Scheduled Caste

ST\*: Scheduled Tribes

**Table: 1.3 Numbers of Elected Representatives in District Panchayat (District Level)**

Year	DP - (Total)	DP – (SC)	DP – (ST)	DP – (Women)
2001	14,617	1,830	1,197	3,460
2002	10,927	1,690	1,368	3,605
2004	11,708	2,201	1,322	4,923
2006	15,694	2,734	1,649	5,779
2008	15,613	2,729	1,723	5,810
2009*	15,581	2,690	1,716	5,778

Source: Secondary Data from Ministry of Panchayati Raj in India.

DP\*: District Panchayat

SC\*: Scheduled Caste

ST\*: Scheduled Tribes

See the table 1, 2&3 in the following year of 2001 to 2009 the village panchayat, Intermediate Panchayat and District Panchayat number of Dalit and women's are elected and slightly increased the women participation and empowered the panchayat raj Institutions in India.

### **The Problems Faced Dalit in Panchayati Raj Institutions**

Normally, the emerging Dalit representatives are facing two kinds of problems first is before conducting election, they face opposition from the traditional leadership and after election they have fear with problems of bureaucracy that is not seen by them as supportive as towards other community representatives. There has been a sharp increase in caste-based violence in the panchayats in the last 20 years. The dominant castes see the panchayats as one of the tools for the lower castes to assert their rights. The prevailing trend is to weaken and destroy these instruments. It is evident that the upper castes people have been controlling the affairs of the Dalit village and the local community are yet not able to enjoy their rights. But the Dalit's representatives are more suffering one day ahead to the elections due to the some factors like, caste violence, Caste hierarchy, Discrimination by dominant caste, Poor economy background, Poverty and so on.. At the same time discouragements by others, working propaganda by opponents, lack of funds, pressurizing them to withdraw from the contest and filling the nomination paper. some of the people who support them are mostly those of same caste people who want to see development and better conditions in their

lives it is these people who are giving encouragement during the election time. Financial help from their supporters mobilizes voters like requesting to put vote in their favor. This is a significant kind of problems faced by Dalits and especially Dalit women during Panchayat election time.

We can see in the newspaper, media and other social networks displays some more elected Dalit representatives after coming to positions of power, they are restricted to exercise of their leadership ambition, Dalit members are made to sit outside the panchayat offices on the floor while the traditional village headmen occupy the chairs of political power. They are facing lots of problems including, caste discrimination, and vested interest have been greatest stumbling block for any development work. Anti-social incidents have been added an invidious to them like caste-violence, verbally abused, insulted and etc. lack of the funds, the elected Dalit representatives makes to feel them helpless because of limited powers given to them under the Panchayat Raj Act for the implementation of work.

Many of the Dalit representatives they don't know how to use and utilize their powers. Their powers are occupied by the dominant caste members. Allegations includes compulsion to sign blank cheques without giving details of their utilization, non-cooperation of dominant caste members in panchayat councils, prevention of Dalit presidents from passing resolutions and denial of access to panchayat records, account books and registers. Dalit representatives had faced discrimination in many states and places in India.

### **Conclusion**

In recent decade lower castes are enjoying political rights as well as developing their community and changing their social positions in positive way. Both high caste and low caste people are working together and cooperating with each one for their community development and rural development. Dalits have good relations with high caste people but still caste hierarchy problems exist which makes them not to enter inside the panchayat offices and not even sit in front of other caste representatives. The high caste people even after their tenure as a chairperson still hold the power in the office and continue to dominate the panchayat activities. Most of the Dalit women are not interested in participating elections but they have to display proxy interest in panchayat election through the member of high caste or their husbands. Due to their social disadvantage, position of Dalit women in panchayat appears only a mockery of the constitutional provisions. The elections are controlled by the upper caste men and the elected women representatives act as their puppets only. The Government and Non-Government organization should take necessary action for Dalit and Dalit women to provide proper training facilities for administration work in Panchayat offices; they should be given proper awareness programs for community development, to give education facilities for all Dalit and Non-Dalit representatives, to develop their skills, knowledge power and to explain the values of their powers and authority and so on to create and empower Dalit and Dalit women in a positive way of encouragement to politically participate and perform in Panchayati Raj Instructions in India without any Problems faced as a Dalit.

### **Recommendation**

- ❖ The Dalit spaced problems of poverty and deprivation for a long time. That should be changed as a positive way. The government should tack necessary actions and development activities for Dalit communities in the way of economic, social and political. That development

process should be kept out the exploitation, inequality, oppression and discrimination by the others community.

- ❖ The empowerment activities will be a hope for Dalit and other communities to give socio-psychological way of mobilization in positive ways.
- ❖ Panchayati Raj keep the all possibilities for the creation of new social order. It provides a platform for grassroot action. In many places, it has been an instrument of liberation, education and collective intervention and critical thinking of marginalized groups to shape their own future.
- ❖ The interface with the bureaucracy mainly at the grassroot level has to be improved and should be given proper training in dealing with panchayati Raj activities.
- ❖ The elected representatives of Panchayat members needed full awareness of their functions. It can be imparted through effective training programme. There should be a programme for educated and un-educated men and women elected representatives. Once they are educated and aware they can assert their rights in the Gram Sabha meetings.
- ❖ Since the majority of the Dalit elected representatives are not attending meeting regularly, they are poor and depend upon daily wage income. Therefore, it is necessary to reimburse them for their loss of wage.
- ❖ There should be focus on new areas of work for the Dalit and for women representatives such as land rights, atrocities, child labour, payment of minimum wages and child centered issues.
- ❖ Dominant Caste or high caste people should be encourage and support to Dalit and Dalit women to participate Panchayati Raj Institutions and the Government should be given proper protections for Dalits who are participated and elected Dalit representatives from the high caste people or dominant caste in any village in India.
- ❖ No discrimination should be followed in the Panchayat offices. At the time of discussions for all development programmes and to appreciate Dalit ideas, though and suggestions to give for development activities and planning work.
- ❖ Special provisions to ensure smooth and fair election process of Dalit women to panchayats need to be implemented. This could be done by appointing a special officer to look into the matters relating to the same.
- ❖ Granting more decisive power to the local bodies is a step further in the empowerment of Dalit women sarpanches, the bureaucratic structures should functions as an aide to the Gram Panchayats.
- ❖ Civil society organisations can help in empowering the women by educating them directly and being an ally in representing their cause to state authorities.

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